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ABSTRACT

The Blue Ribbon Schools (BRS) program was designed in 1982 with three purposes in mind: to identify and recognize outstanding schools; to provide schools a tool and criteria for self-assessment and improvement; and to facilitate the sharing of best practices among schools. This book presents profiles and best practices of 12 elementary, 2 middle, and 11 secondary schools, all private schools and winners of the BRS award between 2000 and 2002. (The profiles are not intended to present the best practices of the best schools or even the best practices of particular schools, but only distinguished practices of some of the more than 400 public and private Blue Ribbon Schools.) The book presents the actual responses the schools gave to questions posed in the BRS application, which fit into eight categories: (1) student focus and support; (2) school organization and culture; (3) challenging standards and curriculum; (4) active teaching and learning; (5) professional community; (6) leadership and educational vitality; (7) school, family, and community partnerships; and (8) indicators of academic success. For each of the 25 schools showcased in this book, select responses to select questions are presented. (Contains an index of BRS program categories.) (WFA)

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Distinguished Practices of Distinguished Schools

Council for American Private Education

October 2002

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Voice of America's Private Schools

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Distinguished Practices of Distinguished Schools

compiled and edited by staff at the
Council for American Private Education
October 2002

layout and cover design by Sheila Harrington

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Introduction

At a time when much is written about what's wrong with American education, this is a book about what's right.

For two decades, the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools (BRS) program has been identifying and recognizing outstanding public and private elementary and secondary schools whose programs and practices make them models of excellence. One purpose of the program is to share the distinguished practices of these distinguished schools with other schools. This book seeks to do that by presenting noteworthy excerpts from the applications of some recent private school recipients of the BRS award.

The document is, of necessity, limited. First, it focuses on winners of the BRS award, a group drawn from schools that have chosen to apply for the distinction. There are numerous schools of excellence across the country that do not seek BRS recognition. Second, although the program has been in existence since 1982, this publication selects from schools that received the award between 2000 and 2002. The selection pool is further limited to private schools, which, since the program's inception, have constituted about 20 percent of BRS awardees. While the country is blessed with an abundance of exemplary public schools, the focal point for the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), which undertook this project, is, of course, private schools. Finally, the book presents a mere sampling of practices described in the applications of some of the winning schools. Eighty-five private schools received the BRS award between 2000 and 2002 (three-fourths of those were Catholic schools). Each school submitted a 40-page application chock-full of wonderful practices that have helped account for the school's success. CAPE's staff culled those applications to select the examples of noteworthy practices presented here. These are not intended to be the best practices of the best schools, or even the best practices of a particular school, but only distinguished practices of some Blue Ribbon Schools.

Contents and Organization

The book presents the actual responses that schools gave to questions posed in the BRS application. For the years covered, the questions in the application fell into eight categories:

A. Student Focus and Support
B. School Organization and Culture
C. Challenging Standards and Curriculum
D. Active Teaching and Learning

E. Professional Community
F. Leadership and Educational Vitality
G. School, Family, and Community Partnerships
H. Indicators of Academic Success

Previously recognized schools also had to complete a ninth category of questions, and schools seeking recognition in a special emphasis area (e.g., technology) had to complete an optional tenth category.

Each category included specific questions (for a total of 43) to which the school had to respond in depth. For each of the 25 schools showcased in this book, select responses to select questions are presented. Schools are grouped as high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.

How Schools Became Blue Ribbon Schools

Since the program first started, public and private schools have had to go through an arduous application process before being recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools. (Note: The selection process and criteria have changed for schools seeking recognition in 2003 and beyond.) State education departments (for public schools) and CAPE (for private schools) would submit school applications to the U.S. Department of Education for review by a national review panel. Panel members evaluated a school's responses to questions using rigorous review standards. They also examined years of standardized test results to make sure the school passed certain performance criteria. Schools that survived the national review were then visited to make sure their applications accurately reflected their programs. Finally, after reviewing site visit reports, the national panel would make its final selection.

The process and program were designed with three purposes in mind:

1) to identify and recognize outstanding schools
2) to provide schools a tool and criteria for self-assessment and improvement
3) to facilitate the sharing of best practices among schools.

The third purpose provides the rationale for this project. The BRS program was not created merely to honor exemplary schools, but also to provide a way to improve other schools through the sharing of ideas and practices. CAPE is pleased and proud to help realize that purpose by presenting this collection of distinguished practices from distinguished schools.

For more information about CAPE and the new No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools program, visit CAPE's Web site at http://www.capenet.org.

Academy of the Holy Angels

Demarest, NJ

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
http://www.holyangels.org

Vision Statement

Academy of the Holy Angels: an educational community rooted in the Catholic faith, empowering young women to lead in a pluralistic world.

Philosophy

The Academy of the Holy Angels, founded in 1879, is a private, Catholic college preparatory school dedicated to the education of young women. Grounded in the gospel message and in the tradition and charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Academy welcomes students from many different communities, ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations, appreciating the uniqueness of each individual while fostering "that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent."[1] Underlying the mission of the Academy is Jesus' final prayer "that all may be one." (Jn 18:21)

Rooted in the "conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons",[2] education at the Academy continues to empower each young woman to reach the fullness of her potential spiritually, morally, intellectually, socially, and physically, so that she in turn may share her gifts with others. The vision permeating life at the Academy is one of a new global community based on Christian values, especially those of interdependence and recognition of women's role in society.

Goals

- To encourage students in the practice of their faith and in the awareness that religion is a way of life;
- To create a strong Christian community which fosters friendship and in

which mutual acceptance, respect, and concern for one another affirm the self-worth and dignity of each person;

- To provide a well-integrated curriculum that will challenge students to independent critical thinking, the love of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence;
- To equip students with the skills necessary for life in a world increasingly dependent upon expanding technologies;
- To provide an academic program for each student suited to her abilities and interests;
- To provide a well balanced co-curricular and extracurricular program which enables students to develop their knowledge, interpersonal relationships and physical well-being;
- To encourage self-discipline and provide an orderly environment as essential supports to our academic atmosphere;
- To engender in the students an awareness of the ever changing role of women in society so that they will be prepared for their future challenges and decisions;
- To encourage leadership in religious, school and civic activities as a means of enhancing their understanding of and commitment to the responsibilities and privileges inherent in our democratic society;
- To help form the students' identity within a global community, calling them to their responsibility to care for the earth and to work toward justice and peace for all peoples, especially the poor.

[1] Constitution & General Directory of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, *You Are Sent* (Milwaukee, 1986) p. 20.
[2] Ibid., p. 28

Indicators of Academic Success

What is your school's overall approach to assessment? How do your methods align with your educational vision/mission and curriculum? What questions about assessment is your school currently addressing?

All forms of assessment reflect rigorous college- preparatory curricular standards. Differences in abilities and interests are addressed through a flexible and supportive Tier System, which effects the best possible match between student needs and curriculum. Each student is evaluated annually in core subjects, moving to higher tiers as she demonstrates progress. Assessment is

thus an inextricable part of our mission to educate young women toward the fullness of their potential by adding significant value to the student's academic life. The program has four interconnected components: norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, quarter averages and alternative assessment. Administration, guidance, chairpersons and teachers collaborate on the analysis and interpretation of assessments and their relationship to curriculum, teaching strategies and learning. Procedures are published in AHA's *Student Handbook, Guidance Guide* and *Course Description Booklet*.

Norm-referenced tests play an important role here. The National Educational Development Test (NEDT) is taken by all ninth graders. All tenth and eleventh graders take the PSAT. All juniors and seniors take the SAT at least twice. The majority of students take three SAT II's at appropriate points in their course of study. English, math and science departments incorporate materials from standardized tests into their courses. All AP students take the AP exams. A deeper understanding of student aptitude gained from test results is used to modify curriculum and provide students with appropriate levels of challenge.

Criterion-referenced tests, administered each semester, provide reliable and consistent information about achievement. These department-approved exams require students to demonstrate mastery of material that meets or exceeds national and/or state standards. As state administered high school proficiency exams are not available to private schools, department exams are our most important indicator of student achievement. The exams are cumulative. Exam preparation is most extensive in ninth grade when students may have their first experience of comprehensive exams. Chairpeople review each semester exam for content, format and grading. Exams for classified students may be modified or untimed. Semester exams represent 20% of the year's final average in core subjects.

Quarter averages integrate information provided by several forms of assessment, including tests and quizzes, homework and class participation, projects, papers, extra-credit and outside assignments. Summary grade reports, sorted by teacher and course, provide an insight into teacher and student performance and effectively counter grade inflation. A grade of 70 indicates minimum proficiency.

Alternative assessments reflect the collaborative model, women's ways of knowing and differences in learning styles. Ninth graders take a learning styles inventory, which teachers use to help them determine appropriate methods of alternative assessment. Every subject area uses alternative assessment to varying degrees. Students appreciate these opportunities to express their understanding in non-traditional ways.

The school is addressing questions about each aspect of the assessment program. The weight given to norm-referenced tests in placement has been reduced in favor of greater emphasis on teacher recommendation. Increased

collaboration in assessment by teachers of the same subject will be a focus of department meetings in 1999-00 as will the increasing role of technology in alternative assessment.

What alternative assessments of student performance do you use?

Alternative assessments are essential in helping the Academy achieve many of its goals. Each discipline uses these assessments to meet learning objectives which students receive in writing. The weight assigned to alternative assessment varies by subject, but the student learning demonstrated by these means has been consistently excellent. Some significant examples follow.

A follow up to the video *Beyond the Looking Glass*, the Spider Web Connection Collage made by all ninth grade Prayer classes concretizes questions such as, "What are my connections?," "Who keeps me rooted, supports my identity?" Students' webs use personal photos and descriptions to depict the individuals who help answer these questions. The goal is to enable students to realize that many people and factors contribute to personal development and to recognize their own unique gifts. Projects are graded according to a rubric; webs are shared for class discussion, and each student writes a reflection sheet on the process and her new awareness.

Seniors in Probability and Statistics apply math to real life when they gather student data on use of time. The class accumulates the data and works with statistical concepts to demonstrate correct processes for calculating and organizing statistical information, e[illegible]encing math as an aid to understanding society.

Global education becomes a reality for students in French IV, who each year visit the New York office of a French corporation and interview a French executive about cultural differences in business practices. Students profile the company, prepare questions and conduct the interview in French. The video taped interview demonstrates the integration of speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

Through the consistent use of rubrics and project guidelines, students take responsibility for learning and discover how to measure their work against a standard of excellence. The ability to archive student work on the network allows them to measure their growth and increases student-teacher interaction. The unique blend of independent study elements with group processes stretches students intellectually, socially and emotionally.

Academy of Our Lady of Mercy

Louisville, KY

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
http://www.win.net/mercy

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Besides the core subjects (e.g., language arts, mathematics, science), what other content areas or programs play essential roles in your schoolwide curriculum?

As a Catholic school sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, the Academy considers religion courses to bean integral part of the curriculum. Unique characteristics of the department include the use of novels, which support the themes or content in the curriculum, encouraging students to share their gifts and talents in their parishes, the integration of the service learning component, and the application of Gardner's Frames of Mind and multiple intelligence theory to religious education. Mercy's religion courses are designed using national standards from the National Catholic Youth Ministry Commission as well as the Catechism. Freshmen explore what it means to be a Christian in today's world in their church course. Sophomores study Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Testament and are encouraged to see the message of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as timeless and meaningful for today. In junior morality, students learn a process for making mature, responsible, and healthy decisions. Contemporary issues such as sexual morality, abortion, euthanasia and biomedical ethics are studied. In junior Catholic spirituality, students study the differences among spirituality, faith, and religion and learn how the three can interact to bring about a meaningful life. The use of scripture, art, music and literature enhances the course as students begin to identify those elements of spirituality that are personally affirming and challenging. The senior social justice course challenges students to see societal problems from the unique perspective offered by Catholic social teaching. Students are encouraged to put Gospel values into practice by examining structural problems in our world and by creatively forming a response to their calling of being Christian. The senior Christian

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lifestyles course encourages students to shape a future that is hopeful, healthy, and full. Many topics are explored in depth including sexuality, intimacy, marriage, effective communication, and the balance of work/leisure. This course continues to build upon the six previous religion courses by having students examine issues and choices in light of the Gospel and Christian tradition.

Mercy provides a service learning program that enables each student to experience and reflect on the mission of Jesus as one who served others. Goals and objectives include offering a holistic experience to individual students; increasing student knowledge of real world systems and the need for systemic change; developing students' sense of self-worth, civic purpose, and personal value; strengthening life skills in areas such as communication, time management, and responsibility; and reflecting on the links between social theory and service practice. Mercy's service learning program is integrated throughout the English, religion, and social studies courses. The freshmen component focuses on improving self-image, awareness of needs, and student motivation for service. Freshmen Insights is a daylong immersion experience designed to create an awareness of the problems of poverty in America and, specifically, in the local area. The sophomore component is a hands-on experience. Students spend five class periods discussing the meaning and purpose of, and the responsibilities in, service work. This service experience involves non-profit agencies throughout the city for a total of three class periods per week. The junior component helps students explore systems and the need for systemic change. Students are placed in agencies that have the ability to effect change through legislation, programming, advocacy, or education. Students spend four days in agencies observing various types of systems and how they work. The senior year encompasses a practicum experience, which focuses on responsibility, choice, and social analysis. Each student completes at least 20 hours of service at an agency of her choice and then completes an I-Search paper and a video presentation on her practicum experience.

Professional Community

What opportunities do teachers and other staff members have to build professional community that enhance their collective capacity to work together to support student learning?

Its committee and organizational structures strengthen Mercy's professional community. The Educational Program Planning Committee (EPPC) oversees school-wide curriculum and instructional evaluation and planning. Comprised of teachers and administrators, the EPPC meets monthly to assess educational program needs, discuss

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current practices, and review strategic planning progress. The Administration Advisory Board (AAB), made up of students, teachers, and administrators, meets quarterly to make recommendations to administration concerning policy or structural changes, which affect our academic, co-curricular, or extracurricular programs. In collaboration with the EPPC, the Professional Development Committee is responsible for planning three professional in-services throughout the year. All teachers and professional staff pursue an individual professional growth plan throughout the year and discuss progress periodically with the administration team.

Other avenues for professional collaboration have included professional development "buddies," case conferencing with the learning differences coordinator and counselors concerning at-risk students or students with special needs, coordination of research skills and projects with the librarian/media specialist, and retreat workshops and follow-ups. Faculty meetings have also been instructional with teachers making mini-presentations on a variety of topics, including teaching strategies for block periods, integrating curriculum between departments, and current teachings of the Catholic Church.

Our Sponsorship Committee is responsible for continuous inservicing of all faculty and staff on Mercy's unique mission and philosophy. This committee plans approximately five spiritual formation and social activities designed to give us a greater understanding of our ministry at Mercy and how this relates to our Mercy Creed. It fosters a spirit of community and camaraderie through prayer, reflection, discussion, and meal sharing. Mercy's Sunshine Committee plans our annual Christmas and end-of-the-year gatherings, along with providing food at in-services, remembering faculty and staff during times of need or grief, and distributing other little gifts or perks throughout the year.

Mercy is proud of our teachers and staff and their many accomplishments. We formally recognize their efforts each semester at the honors ceremony where we present the Heart of Mercy award to a faculty, staff, and student who emulate the spirit of the Mercy Community. Year-end tributes include those who have given service to the school for an established length of time and those who have given extraordinary service throughout the school year. Teacher and staff accomplishments are published in the monthly parent newsletter and the alumnae newsletter. Informally, Mercy's faculty, staff, and students give positive feedback to those who give outstanding effort and quality in their everyday jobs and roles within the building. We also are a very supporting community during times of need and personal tribulations.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

What are the goals and priorities of your school, family, and community partnerships? How have your school and community both improved as a result of these partnerships and how do you measure the improvements?

As stated in our philosophy, we strive to help each student develop a sense of responsibility to herself, her community and society as a whole. We believe in educational partnerships that help students develop this sense and provide mutual benefit. Our strategic vision, Mercy 2000, set the development of partnerships as a goal. Two examples of such partnerships are our service learning program and our status as a Health Promotion School of Excellence.

The goals and priorities of our partnerships are developed in collaboration with our partners, students and other stakeholders. These goals and priorities must fit the mission and the objectives of the school.

A key component of our mission is to enable students to be leaders in service to others. To accomplish this we have developed a comprehensive four-year nationally recognized (by The Council for Religion and Independent Schools) service learning program. The priorities and objectives of the program were developed by a group of students, teachers, parents and community agency representatives guided by a facilitator provided through a grant from the prestigious Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence. One year was spent on developing priorities and objectives for this program.

Today this program involves 100 agencies and takes students from an awareness of the need for service to the concept of systemic change and the skills of social analysis and problem solving. This provides a practical means for each agency to be in contact with interested, involved young people and to be a part of the educational process. Some agencies have recruited students to continue their service outside of the program and some have actually employed students as a result of the partnership.

Students benefit from an increased awareness of the needs of other people, the positive aspects of providing direct service, and the training and tools which enable them to be agents of change. Through a careful connection with areas of career interest, students also explore possible areas of future work and ways to accomplish this work as a form of ministry and service. Constant assessment and evaluation keeps the program strong, fresh and effective.

Another partnership, which evolved from Mercy's strong relationship with

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the healthcare community, is our participation as a Health Promotion School of Excellence. This program provides community health workers with research data and access to young people in order to promote life-long habits of health. Students receive a valuable supplement to the health curriculum and experience activities that teach them how and why to apply the content of the curriculum on a daily basis. Extensive evaluation for the last three years has given us a good picture of the habits of our students and the effectiveness of the program.

Academy of Our Lady of Peace
San Diego, CA

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1989, 1993, and 2000
Special Emphasis Winner in Character Education 2000
http://www.aolp.org

Summary

The Academy of Our Lady of Peace is a private, Catholic secondary school located in San Diego, California. Established in 1882 as the city's first high school, the Academy is sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. This year the Academy serves 737 young women in grades 9-12 who live throughout San Diego County, as far north as Oceanside, as far east as Valley Center, as far south as Tijuana, and as far west as the Pacific Beach cities. Enrollment this year includes 32 students who commute daily to the school from Mexico.

In the community, the Academy has a reputation as a school whose students model community service, exhibit college-ready learning skills, and develop the self-confidence needed for entrance into competitive job markets. Dedicated specifically to the learning needs of women, the Academy's mission reaches back to its founding when education for girls was non-existent in San Diego, and anticipates emerging opportunities for women in the future. To offer support to students whose family structures lack an adult female presence, the Academy sponsors an Alumnae-Student Mentoring Program. Acknowledging the importance that community building and service-oriented professions and avocations are to developing young women, the school created a Community Service Coordinator position on campus enabling the school to provide a full-time supervisor for individual, class and agency-sponsored service projects. Desiring to provide opportunities in math and science for young women to develop competitive learning skills in areas not traditionally associated with female students, the Academy offers hands-on experience with graphing calculators, electrophoresis chambers, electronic balances, and computer interfaces for real-time data collection and recording in the laboratory. Responding to recent research indicating that Graphic Arts has the smallest representation of women among its professionals, the Academy also designed and built a Graphic Arts lab enabling students to gain experience in darkroom procedures, camera-ready design, and computer-generated graphics.

Special Emphasis Areas: Character Education

Within the expected schoolwide learning results for all Academy students and the adults who guide them are a set of characteristics that distinguish OLP community members as persons with identifiable values and lifelong pursuits. Among these are the desire to:

- exhibit integrity, responsibility, sociability and self-esteem;
- foster harmony in interpersonal relationships;
- set realistic goals and expectations;
- appreciate differing points of view;
- demonstrate friendliness, adaptability, empathy and courtesy;
- improve the learning experience at OLP;
- give unselfishly of time and talent;
- distinguish themselves by example;
- participate in and value community service; and
- embody the values of excellence tempered by gentleness, peace and joy.

The establishment of these goals was a synergistic process involving students, parents, faculty and Board members. The results formed a statement of commitment made by all stakeholders to be persons who are Christ-centered in their relationships, enthusiastic in their openness to new ideas and learnings, effective in their ability to listen to one another, and daring in their acceptance of a call to leadership that is believed to exist in every person.

As a way of making this commitment to character education visible to all stakeholders, references are made to this set of values as frequently as possible. Students studying their course selection options are reminded to be "realistic in setting goals." Students completing service hour requirements are reminded to practice "empathy and courtesy." Students experiencing conflict with another member of the community are coached in "ways to appreciate differing points of view" and work toward reconciliation in a "gentle" manner.

The three programs which most clearly exemplify the Academy's commitment to character formation are the Parents as Co-Educators Program, the Community Service Program and the Advisement / Peer Counseling Program. Students learn early in their Academy experience that all important school-related decisions necessarily involve themselves, their families, and their teachers/ counselors. The Parent Manual portion of the Parent Student Handbook contains special sections identifying parents as partners in mission, in participation, in learning, in communication, in traditioning, in parenting, in support services, in discipline, in athletic competition, in rights and in responsibilities. Parents are

invited to join with their daughters in prayer, in celebration, in problem-solving, in academic planning, and in decision-making. Freshman parents are invited to model for their daughters "balance in making choices and accepting responsibilities." Sophomore parents are asked to share with their daughters the exciting and yet threatening world of "new friendships" and "lost friendships." Junior parents are alerted to their daughters' emerging sense of leadership potential. Senior parents are reminded that while teachers drop out of a student's life once she graduates, "parents are parents for life."

Partnership with organizations off campus also enrich the adolescent-adult bonds that emerge during the high school years. The Academy works with the St. Vincent de Paul Center to sponsor community service retreats for students, giving them a unique opportunity to meet people in need, help satisfy their needs, and share with other care-givers the meaning of the spirit of service. Twice each year, the Academy allies its community with Catholic Charities in San Diego to provide food, clothing, toys, and friendship to 28 families in need of [illegible] a support. The phone company in San Diego asked if their employees could [illegible]k with Academy students in some of their social outreach programs. The San Diego Aids Foundation annually invites Academy students to participate in their fundraising walk-a-thons, their food pantry collection drives, and their food delivery services to persons unable to leave their homes. Sophomore students joined with a civic group in the neighborhood to prepare layettes for women who would not otherwise be able to provide such gifts for their newborns. Students with strong bilingual skills visited the teenagers at the Las Palomas Detention Facility for Women in Tijuana to offer friendship, grooming supplies, and encouragement.

Fostering "right relationships" is a goal that comes directly from the Sisters of St. Joseph, who sponsor the school, and expresses the value of relational living that is the foundation of the Academy's educational vision. The Department of Guidance and Counseling has, therefore, developed four programs which challenge each member of the OLP community to accept individual differences and make responsible choices.

The Advisory / Multi-Media Program enables all students and faculty to participate in an educational, discussion-oriented program utilizing student-developed, multimedia presentations, educational brochures, and interactive discussions. Groups meet weekly throughout the entire academic year and discuss issues pertaining to adolescent development. A student-prepared video presentation accompanies each discussion topic, and each video features students, parents and psychology professionals who share their experiences and expertise.

Peer Support Groups are facilitated by student leaders, and are designed to address issues of self-esteem, communication within families and friends, sexuality, leadership roles of women, obstacles and risk-taking. The major goal of these groups is to encourage each student to believe in her voice and to allow her to share

her opinions and questions in a supportive environment. Student leaders utilize their original work, Peer Counseling – Paving the Way, which was submitted to the U.S. Library of Congress for copyright in 1998 and will be published to share with other high schools and youth groups in the coming year.

The Testimonial Program is an interactive program which creates an interdisciplinary partnership with the Religious Studies Department. It involves both personal sharing and small group discussion opportunities. Each peer leader presents a five minute testimonial addressing challenges through adversity and spiritual growth followed by an interactive discussion activity with other students.

The Sophomore / Parent Teen Communication Program unites students and parents in a forum which discusses adolescent sexuality and communication. Attitudes and issues are discussed which provide the key to responsible decision-making regarding adolescent sexuality. Parents and teens participate in a one hour discussion group facilitated by a student leader, which allows each party to understand the questions / anxieties / fears that impact each age group.

Without the continuing education of its faculty and staff, the students at the Academy would not receive the inspiration and support which they need to develop a strong sense of moral integrity and civic responsibility. To provide this critical learning foundation, the Academy provides for its adult community annual retreats and workshops on topics which integrate character education into school life. Themes that have been developed over the past six years include: Fidelity to Right Relationships (1994-95), Valuing Interdependence in our Diversity (1995-96), Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolence (1996-97), Leadership and the New Science: Conflict Resolution Techniques (1997-98), Global Interdependence (1998-99), and the Spirituality of a Learning Community (1999-00). The professional guidance which these workshops and retreats have provided, and the resources which they have made available, have in turn resulted in the formulation of new school policies. These policies have helped to shape and guarantee that character education remains central to the Academy's educational programs. Examples of newly developed policies/programs that reflect this commitment to character formation are: the Academic Integrity Policy, calling for all students to understand and demonstrate the meaning of honesty in the pursuit of learning; the revised Community Service Policy, which requires that all students include within their service contributions an experience in an environment oriented project, a church or school oriented project, a social service project, and a community awareness project; and the student awards policy, which acknowledges qualities of character that extend beyond academics alone. The Academy specifically honors students at each grade level who epitomize spirit, service and leadership. Comparable honors are awarded to faculty and staff at the close of each academic year.

Assessment

The character education dimension of the Academy's Parent, Community Service and Advisory Programs is seen as central to the school's mission, and is consequently a part of every student's learning experience. As a way of evaluating whether these programs meet the diverse needs of the school community, students are invited to assess these services every year. The input received from these questionnaires is used to determine the issues to be addressed in the following year. Parent survey and interview information were added in 1998. When asked to select the one most valued type of interpersonal support at the Academy, these assessments revealed the following results: friendliness and courtesy (26% of students, 24% of parents); acceptance and diversity (20% of students, 18% of parents); high spirit and involvement (23% of students, 17% of parents); and seriousness and goal-orientation (19% of students, 30% of parents).

In the area of Community Service, the single experience most valued was: learning about community needs (26% of students, 20% of parents); learning about self as a person of service (27% of students, 34% of parents); meeting other persons of service (17% of students, 12% of parents); seeing a positive difference in our world (22% of students, 30% of parents).

In the area of Counseling Services, the single opportunity was: weekly advisee program (24% of students, 33% of parents); peer support / peer counseling program (29% of students, 21% of parents); student-to-student interactions (10% of students, 6% of parents); and counselor-student interactions (25% of students, 28% of parents).

The comparable distribution of each of the above responses indicates to the Academy that students with different needs are successfully finding support from the programs which most impact character formation. It also seems important to note that while adolescent issues vary from year to year, there remains a consistent interest in maintaining strong links with parents / families, fostering a spirit of community awareness, and building upon the notable desires to form interpersonal relationships that characterize maturing adolescent females.

> *For the students, faculty, staff, parents and Board of Directors at the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, the commitment to "uniting persons with persons" is integral to the learning process. Character formation as well as intellectual development form the equally important components of a mission that aims to "challenge each student to become a responsible woman educated to the needs of society."* (Philosophy Statement)

Aquinas High School

Bronx, NY

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
http://www.aquinashs.org

Summary Statement

If you see a graceful brick building with rounded contours and a serene cloister walk neighboring graffiti-marked apartment buildings; if you hear the melodious sound of a string orchestra prevailing over New York City police sirens; if you mingle with 800 exuberant young women gathered for a ring-blessing ceremony around a circular garden of magnificent roses in the inner city, you're not dreaming—you've arrived at Aquinas High School in the South Bronx, New York.

Student Focus and Support

How would you describe your student population? What are your students' needs? How do you assure that the needs of all students are met?

The student population of Aquinas High School consists of 819 young women of the inner city. Diverse in culture and in academic potential, they come to Aquinas from 70 public and parochial schools in the Bronx and Manhattan. Twenty-five percent of Aquinas families are on public assistance, and 71% qualify for the federal breakfast and lunch program. Aquinas values the opportunity to provide two good meals for students each day, and the increasing number (currently 300 students) who come early for breakfast provides evidence of a need fulfilled. In addition, every effort is made to obtain funding to provide for extras which would be a financial burden. (For example, graphing calculators partially funded by Toshiba America are given to students; a minibus, funded by the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill provides safe transportation for clubs and teams.)

The overall need of the young women of Aquinas High School is to develop their intellectual, physical, emotional, social and spiritual capacity in the climate of

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rich cultural diversity within the school community. These needs of students, as related to the goals of the school, are as follows:

Spiritual Needs: To develop their religious and sacramental life in the context of a faith community; to explore the implications of message, community, and service; to grow in Christian values.

Intellectual Needs: To develop a desire for learning, and to recognize that learning is a lifelong process; to acquire a general and varied education, focusing on communication and reasoning skills, which are essential for a productive life.

Civic Needs: To understand the process of citizenship in order to participate in and contribute to the communities and governments of our democratic society; to develop an awareness of individual responsibility for the environment.

Social Needs: To develop good character and leadership skills; to actualize their potential in order to ensure gratifying employment; to grow in the knowledge of their cultural heritage while appreciating and respecting the cultures of other peoples.

Health and Physical Needs: To build their moral, physical, and emotional health and to encourage others to do the same.

These needs are the focus of the goals of the school, which are realistic and achievable and are regularly reviewed by the administration and faculty in processes of self-study. For example, in the recent self-study for the Middle States Association, a change was made in the civic goals. "To develop an awareness of individual responsibility for the environment" was added. The word "environment" was meant to include not only the natural world which we are obliged to safeguard but also the society in which we live. The goals are outlined in detail in the student, parent, and faculty handbooks, and are noted at parent, staff, and class meetings.

Academic needs are carefully monitored and are addressed with individualized attention. From its beginning, Aquinas has educated young women with a wide range of academic abilities. There are three instructional levels at Aquinas: advanced placement, college level and honors Regents; Regents; and academic. Placement of incoming students is based on a combination of standardized test scores (Cooperative Admissions Examination, Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) and previous school records. After initial placement, students are not tracked into one instructional grouping, but select courses based on their individual performance, interest, and ability. Standardized test scores are helpful in the process of monitoring student course selections. Guidance counselors, subject teachers and department chairpersons work together to help students select courses that meet their needs and challenge their abilities. Course selections require written parental approval. Each year, a curriculum planning workshop is offered to parents

of 9th graders to familiarize them with the courses offered at Aquinas, the requirements for a Regents and local diploma, and the expectations of colleges.

Finally, needs are individual, and student needs have as many facets as students have. It is above all in the network of caring relationships between and among students, faculty and administration that student needs are recognized and addressed.

How does your school determine and address the developmental needs of students as they move from grade to grade?

Developmental needs of students are at the heart of Aquinas' mission to educate the whole person. From the first introduction of a student to Aquinas, great care is taken to establish a sense of belonging and to facilitate living and learning in this school community. A two-week academic orientation, the EXCEL program, is offered to incoming freshmen during the summer. A special freshman assembly with an assistant principal introduces 9th graders to the essentials of school life. The "Words of Welcome" booklet is a ready reference summary of information for the newcomer.

The parents of every student receive a personal phone call from a faculty member within a month of their daughter's first day at Aquinas. The purpose of the call is to ensure that the new school experience is a good one, and to attend to any concerns which might be expressed. This process is called the WE CARE program, and its name is a hallmark of the Aquinas approach to students. A key factor in determining appropriateness of programs and services is listening to students and parents: their opinions, their response in the classroom, in homeroom, in Student Council meetings and parent meetings, in informal interaction between students, teachers, parents and administrators.

The Jesuit Secondary Education Association Survey and an annual guidance survey administered to all of our students provide data on the suitability of programs and services. Aquinas students indicate that the school offers a challenging instructional program and interesting activities. Comparison of responses of the Class of '99 as freshman and seniors shows significant growth in self-esteem, commitment to justice, and responsible citizenship during their years at Aquinas.

For transfer students, a Welcome Breakfast is hosted by the Student Council; throughout their first year at Aquinas all transfer students meet with a counselor individually once every seven-day cycle. Also, class assemblies and parent conferences at each grade level in the beginning of the school year facilitate the transition of new students into the school. The same care is shown with students

who transfer from Aquinas. A counselor works with the student and her parents until enrollment at the new school is complete. With the rare student who drops out (less than one-tenth of one percent) follow-up is continued. For example, through the work of the Guidance Department, a student who left Aquinas a few years ago recently completed the requirements and received her diploma. This postponed achievement is valued as much at Aquinas as the advanced work of one who has less difficulty in achieving.

Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy High School

Cincinnati, OH

Association of Christian Schools International
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
http://www.chca-oh.org

School Organization and Culture

What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does the school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

Students have many opportunities at the high school to develop healthy, trust-based relationships with adults, and it starts at the top. The principal and dean of students set the example for the faculty and parent volunteers by spending most of their time among the students. No one passes them in the hallway without a greeting or a hug. Their open-door policy is well known, and they are conscious of any problems students may be having at home or with friends. For example, one senior girl recalls that as a freshman new to CHCA, she was depressed and on the verge of dropping out of school. Every morning for an entire month she would sit in her car and cry until the principal and dean of students would coax her to come into the school. "They made me feel worthwhile and would not give up on me," she said. Two years ago, the guidance counselor and dean of students saw a need for a support group for teens of divorced or separated parents. The group, facilitated by the counselor and the dean, meets weekly over eight weeks and centers on sharing feelings so the students come to accept themselves and feel hope for the future. These leaders have set the example that is followed by the entire faculty. On any given day both before and after school, students, teachers and parents gather together in informal, friendly discussions. The HS Bible department's creation of a lounge area where students and teachers hang out together has become a popular place to discuss issues of faith and life.

Development of positive peer relationships, role modeling, and respect among students of all ages is a high priority. The healthy, caring adult and student

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relationships at the HS influence the peer climate in a positive way. As students feel more accepted and comfortable with themselves, they are more generous with their peers.

Strong relationships are fostered through HS programs such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Discipleship study groups, and Student Organized Service. As they work and live side by side for extended periods while fulfilling their 120 hours of service, the students build lasting relationships with one another and with those in the community. Two students who barely knew each other spent a day grilling hot dogs together at an inner-city medical clinic. They walked away as friends. A sophomore came back from her Mission Trip with three new friends and a lot more confidence. In fall 2001, CHCA HS and MS students will meet for a series of panel discussion in the Peer Mentor/Character Development series. Topics include: "Built-in Controls: You're in Charge" and "The Content of One's Character."

Professional Community

How does a coherent approach to professional development for teachers and other staff ensure their ability to implement effectively the school's curriculum, instructional strategies, and support system?

The goal of CHCA professional development is increased student performance. CHCA places high priority on developing expertise in each faculty member to serve students effectively. The state of Ohio charges each chartered nonpublic school to appoint a Local Professional Development Committee [LPDC] to oversee and review professional development plans for coursework, continuing education units, or other equivalent activities. CHCA's LPDC has established twelve areas from which teachers receive renewal points toward certificate renewal: college credit, professional conferences/workshops/in-services, peer observations and school visits, curriculum development, memberships on professional committees, publication of an article, publication of a book or dissertation, mentor/assessor function, educational travel, educational project/research, spiritual growth, and full-time teaching experience. Teachers submit yearly professional development plans that list goals aligning to the district and building goals. Each spring teachers meet with the building principal to assess goal achievement. Student performance data signals areas of professional development need. Teachers newly assigned to Advanced Placement classes attend a week-long summer

institute where instructional strategies and scoring criteria are emphasized. Each fall AP teachers attend day-long regional workshops to learn of any changes to the testing format, to receive the most recent exams, and to hone their scoring skills. Both math and English teachers saw needs for score improvement on the PSAT test, and this resulted in (1) math professional development in hands-on instruction to increase the instructional approaches, and (2) English teachers participating in the Ohio Writing Project workshops and portfolio grading to increase student success. Modern Foreign Language teachers attended workshops in Total Physical Response.

CHCA supports an active mentoring program where each new teacher receives a mentor who assists in acculturating the new teacher and serves as an advocate. This year-long relationship is supported with the mentoring handbook, district meetings, social occasions, workshops, and the expectation of regular meetings, thus providing vital, timely assistance to the new teacher.

Leadership and Educational Vitality

How does leadership move the school toward its vision/ mission? How is the instructional leadership role defined and implemented? How are resources aligned with goals?

School leadership at CHCA HS inspires faculty, staff, students, and parents to embrace the school's mission through involvement. The principal's leadership style reflects a "bottom-up" structure that involves all segments of the school community in the process of planning, implementing and evaluating goals, priorities, policies, programs, and use of resources. It is the direct responsibility of the principal to ensure that the school's mission and core values are upheld, meeting the needs of every student and matching resources with established priorities. The principal and the Leadership Team meet in June to (1) determine how effectively yearly goals have been met, (2) identify areas needing improvement, and (3) establish goals for the next school year. For example, recommendations following the accreditation site visit encouraged the school to design assessment for the benchmarked curriculum as well as to consider various standardized tests to measure student learning. Arising logically from the curriculum work, assessment aligned to the benchmarks took shape as the now complete document *Performance Assessment of Benchmark Learning: Grades 9-12*. Thus, the HS Leadership Team chose as a 2000-2001 goal to integrate the performance assessments developed the year before into the overall assessment of

each subject area. Time was provided for teachers to formulate rubrics to evaluate projects more effectively. This task was accomplished through teamwork as department heads assumed leadership for their particular subjects, and in-service time and oversight were provided by the executive assistant for academics and the principal. Consequently, teachers improved their instruction by providing a variety of ways to evaluate student learning and by offering more opportunities for student success. Students gained in self-esteem and sense of accomplishment by demonstrating their knowledge in a variety of ways that allow some degree of choice in expression of understanding. This same teamwork produced the Academic Honesty Policy that guides student ethical conduct in academic work.

Holy Names Academy

Seattle, WA

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1985, 1991, 1996 and 2002
http://www.holynames-sea.org

Summary

Founded in 1880 by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Holy Names Academy, Seattle, Washington, is a Catholic, college-preparatory high school for girls. We are accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and by the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools. The Academy draws its students from a broad cross-section of metropolitan Seattle. When other private schools moved to suburban areas, we maintained our historic commitment to urban education and chose to stay in the central city to serve a student population from diverse ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds. The main school building, constructed in 1907, is recognized as part of Seattle's architectural heritage and plays an important part in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of which it is a landmark; our McAteer Lee Gymnasium constructed in 1990 provides a contemporary facility for women's athletics. Our building is open long hours each day, from 6:30 a.m. until evening, hosting a wide variety of activities and services beyond the daily schedule of classes. These include both public and private events, such as weddings, meetings, drama rehearsals, and athletic activities.

Our central mission is the education of young women. Although this has been the case over the entire 121-year history of the school, this mission's viability and value have been underscored by recent national reports demonstrating the advantages girls gain when they learn in a single-gender setting. At Holy Names, this is shown not only in academics but in leadership; over 40% of our students hold leadership positions in our school at any one time. Our commitment to diversity is also crucial to our mission. For the past twenty-five years, young women of color have made up at least 30% of our student population, with the current level at 33%. Twenty-five percent of our students represent faith traditions other than Catholic. Thirty percent of our students receive some form of need-based financial aid, reflecting our commitment to economic diversity as well; we project $375,000 in scholarship assistance in the upcoming school year.

Our diverse student body participates fully in our challenging academic program, including Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which we are committed to keeping accessible to all HNA students. Our curriculum is rigorous and each student is expected to succeed through her own serious effort, but the entire school community stands ready to aid her in that effort. An excerpt from the capsule report of the *2000/2001 Seattle Times Guide to Schools* attests to this commitment:

> "The school gets especially high marks for taking students from modest backgrounds and making them strong students, with an extremely challenging academic program and a strong sense of community."

Over the past five years, our curriculum has grown to offer more and more opportunities for challenging studies, including a new AP Art History course in 1998 and a new AP Computer Science course in 2000. We strive to make our Honors/AP program accessible to the widest possible range of students, with the result that it is inclusive and representative of the racial and economic diversity of our entire student body. In fact, in the last five years, the number of students taking at least one Advanced Placement course by the time they graduate has risen from 70% to 92%. And while the majority of AP candidates in the state are eleventh and twelfth graders, our program begins in the tenth grade. Currently, 59% of sophomores are enrolled in AP Biology, AP European History, AP Art History, or AP Computer Science.

In an atmosphere that fosters inclusion, respect, and affirmation, our students achieve at the highest possible levels. Over 80% of our Class of 2001 earned college admissions honors and scholarships, and 95% enrolled in four-year colleges or universities. Last year our students earned 66 AP Scholar Awards, and 25% of our graduating class was recognized by the National Merit, National Achievement, or National Hispanic Recognition Programs.

Our strong academic program is balanced by equal commitments to our extensive cocurricular and community service programs. Student-initiated clubs, school plays, dance teams, choirs, sports teams, and more all provide students with an opportunity to learn leadership, to work on a cooperative endeavor, and to live their values. Community service is intrinsic to our program. Holy Names Academy identifies itself as part of its neighborhood through community involvement and civic service. Our students volunteer in agencies all over the city of Seattle and in their own localities. Our service program extends through all four years and has as its goal not only the providing of the services themselves, but also the development in the students of the attitude that service and stewardship are normal parts of citizenship, not just school requirements.

In the eleven years since the construction of the McAteer Lee Gymnasium, we have also dramatically improved our athletic program, adding new sports and

new second and third teams in most existing sports. Now, 85% of our students participate in at least one team sport while at the Academy. Our teams have become more competitive. We won our first-ever State AAA Championship in spring 1998, earned four additional State Championships in the last three years, and won the Metro League's Sportsmanship Recognition Award in 1999 and its All Sports Trophy in 2000.

Our success is the direct result of an involved network of supporters including trustees, alumnae, parents, alumnae parents, and friends. Nowhere is this more evident than in our strong development program. We have successfully completed three capital campaigns, launched in 1980, 1990, and 1996. The funds raised have strengthened our endowment and provided the resources to make our beautiful and historic building an optimum place for teaching and learning.

The long-range planning process conducted in concert with our last capital campaign has resulted in significant enhancements to the learning environment over the last five years. These improvements have inspired teachers to incorporate new technologies and methodologies. One of the most significant renovations was the networking of our campus to our own library resources and to the Internet, along with the simultaneous creation of two new computer labs adjacent to the library. We also increased our instructional space to accommodate enrollment growth and to support new curricular programs. We constructed or reclaimed ten new multipurpose classrooms, designed two new art labs, constructed a new science lab, and added a technical theater room.

We are pleased that over the last ten years our enrollment has grown to 590, an ideal size for our facility and our program. We are large enough to offer a breadth of academic and co-curricular programs, while still small enough to personalize the educational experience for our students. Following a dramatic decline in enrollment in the late 1980s, with the student population dropping to an all-time low of 225 on October 1, 1989, our enrollment has grown at a steady rate ever since. We recognize that an increased birth rate and a strong economy have contributed to this trend, but we are confident that our school's significantly improved curriculum and cocurricular programs, coupled with a strengthened and updated marketing effort, have attracted many new students from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds to seek admission to our school.

Holy Names Academy has served the greater Seattle area for over a century. While our mission of educating young women remains at the core of our school, our strength comes from our ability to adapt to the times. Our historic building houses the latest in facilities and programs, all designed to meet the needs of contemporary students. It is our goal that these students, like thousands of graduates before them, leave the Academy prepared to "demonstrate courageous, imaginative leadership in religious, professional and social spheres" (*HNA Mission Statement*).

Student Focus and Support

How is the school's population best described? What are the students' needs? How does the school ensure that the needs of all students are met?

Holy Names Academy attracts students and families who value an excellent academic program, an inclusive and diverse environment, and a strong sense of community. The Academy draws from 85 different Catholic, public, and private middle schools in the region. Our students reflect the ethnic, socio-economic and, to some extent, the religious diversity of Seattle. For over 25 years, at least 30% of our enrollees have been students of color, with the current level at 33%. Thirty percent of the student body requires financial aid. Our families range from single parents to dual income households. From these diverse backgrounds come a variety of students who, while at the Academy, gain confidence and the ability to succeed in higher education. An all-time high of 95% of our students now matriculate to four-year colleges and universities, compared to 84% reported in our 1995-1996 application.

From the admissions process through graduation day, the key to meeting students' needs is a strong focus on personalizing the experience at the Academy for each young woman. Students are immediately assigned an Academic Advisor/ Homeroom Teacher, to guide them in their studies. The master schedule is personalized, planned in a way that allows each student to choose throughout her four years the level of class she finds most appropriate. She may take an Advanced Placement or Honors course in one or several subjects, or in none at all; there is no tracking. Should a student need special assistance, two full-time school counselors, whom we call Academic Mentors, are available to connect her with resources within and beyond the school in order to address either academic or personal issues. Students also receive personal attention from our full-time College Counselor throughout their four years.

Our cocurricular program seeks to provide a place for everyone. In a long-standing tradition, originating with the founding Sisters, the Academy strives to educate the whole person, providing students with opportunities to become well-rounded individuals who function effectively in a diverse world. Activities appeal to a plethora of interests and ability levels, from multicultural awareness to theatre production to financial investments. The Athletic Department, for example, offers teams at all levels, and Campus Ministry's retreats and our community service program involve everyone in the school. Students are encouraged to initiate new clubs to accommodate interests not already represented.

Whether academic or co-curricular, students' needs are identified and met in many ways, both formally and informally. Students are invited to evaluate courses and to suggest new ones; two of our electives, History of the American Peoples and Readings on the American Experience, originated at the students' request to broaden our curriculum. Also seeking a further avenue for research and discussion, students in the Multicultural Student Union created focus groups for exploring the cultures of Americans of Hispanic, African, and Asian/Pacific Islander descent. Faculty members provide ongoing, important information about individual and collective student needs. Parents offer feedback through the Fireside Chats held for each grade, through their response to personal calls made to all new parents, and through parent/teacher conferences and personal contact with administrators. It was parent initiative that brought about the addition of our new enrichment courses in Japanese and Italian. Open communication makes student needs known and aids in finding ways to meet those needs.

What nonacademic services and programs are available to support students, and how do they relate to the student needs and school goals identified?

In keeping with our school's goal of educating the whole person, the Academy strives to provide a caring environment in which our students' personal needs may be addressed along with their academic and cocurricular concerns. At the core of this endeavor are our two trained, certified counselors, whom we call Academic Mentors, a title we chose deliberately because of its more positive, proactive connotation. The Academic Mentor program, developed by our Curriculum Council, is an essential means of fulfilling our mission of guiding each young woman toward reaching her fullest potential. The mentors work with faculty, parents and students to identify those students who need personal or academic assistance, and connect them with appropriate resources. They counsel students on such issues as self-esteem, depression, family conflict, eating disorders, and substance abuse. The mentors arrange tutoring within or beyond the school for students with academic concerns. For students with disabilities, the mentors coordinate their special needs; for example, for a student with cancer, the mentors arranged elevator use, special classroom seating, a rest period during the day, and a full, but manageable, academic schedule throughout her four years, enabling her to graduate with her class and go on to college.

The Academy makes every effort to foster a strong culture of acceptance that encourages students, or friends in their behalf, to come forward and to be proactive

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about their concerns. As a result, our Academic Mentors/Counselors see approximately 25% to 30% of our student body annually. To introduce ninth graders to the idea that seeking assistance is both acceptable and desirable at the Academy, our Peer Mentoring program trains juniors and seniors in life skills and communication so that they, in turn, may lead small groups of ninth graders in discussing general topics of interest while identifying students who may have more specific needs.

Our Campus Ministry program provides other avenues by which students' personal needs may be identified and met. The Campus Minister and student officers plan class retreats, weekend Encounter retreats, service experiences and liturgies that allow for expression of personal concerns.

Since our last application, we have coordinated a program of all-school presentations on health and safety, each generally having special components for students, faculty/staff, and parents (sessions for the latter are hosted by the Parent Board). "Think First" provided guidance in making good choices, "Party Patrol" examined drug and alcohol abuse, and "Personal Awareness and Protection Training" dealt with assault. Students have also initiated clubs related to similar issues; for example, Students Protecting Friends (and its subgroups) stresses healthful decision-making.

Our Lady of Good Counsel High School

Wheaton, MD

All Girls High Schools
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1993 and 2002
http://www.olgchs.org

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

What is the process for continuous curriculum renewal at the school? What questions about curriculum is the school currently addressing?

In the spring of 1999, department chairs (resource teachers) were given packets containing National and State standards for their particular discipline. Also included in the packet were sets of standards from the book *Content Standards: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education* (1999, Marzano, ed.). Time was given for departments to review each standard and designate where in the curriculum it was being covered. Teachers then recommended additions and deletions to the current curriculum. Following department discussions and decisions, faculty members from each department participated in a summer curriculum project, being paid a stipend to revise any curricula as needed. This work began the process of backward design as developed by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins. Stage one—identify the desired results—was completed.

To begin work on stage two of Understanding by Design (UBD)—determine acceptable evidence—faculty members collaborated throughout the 2000-01 school year creating assessments that would demonstrate knowledge of the determined standards and benchmarks. An assessment specialist from a neighboring public school district worked with department chairs to create tests and measurements in the various disciplines. In the spring, the entire faculty worked with an educational consultant from the Association of Curriculum and Development (ASCD) on the Understanding by Design concept. Creating acceptable evidences for each unit covered in the curricula will continue throughout the 2001-02 school year.

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Future plans call for completion of stage three of Understanding by Design—planning learning experiences and instruction for the various curriculums. The school has purchased access to UBD units through ASCD. Teachers will receive support throughout the year as they decide what are the enduring understandings, what questions will foster inquiry, understanding and transfer of learning, and what key knowledge will students acquire as a result of studying a unit.

Plans are in place so that at the end of each year, teachers, resource teachers and the Assistant Principal for Studies will review the curricula. Focus areas will be selected. Currently, the area of focus is on embedding technology in the curriculum.

Active Teaching and Learning

How are teaching practices and learning experiences in the school consistent with current knowledge about successful teaching and learning?

As members of a professional learning community, Good Counsel teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and workshops on the latest research involving brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, varied learning styles, assessment methods, and curriculum development. Through professional development, collaboration, and staff development support, faculty create learning experiences aligned with current research and pedagogy.

Current research points to the need for an emphasis on developing higher-order and critical thinking skills. Teachers at Good Counsel encourage problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills in all classes. Examples of teaching practices that promote these skills abound at Good Counsel. In biology, teachers ask students to identify similarities and differences of inter- or intra-competition of species. In religion classes, students compare world religions to Christianity, and in English classes, Venn diagrams are used to compare and contrast short stories. Students extend and refine knowledge through the use of graphic organizers in history classes, where they discuss the causes of the Civil War, and in psychology classes, where they sequence child growth and development. To facilitate the teaching of electron configurations, chemistry teachers use an analogy of floors in a college dormitory. Teaching in the block lends itself to active learning and the implementation of cooperative learning groups. For example, religion teachers employ the cooperative learning Numbered Heads technique when reviewing for a unit test. Biology, psychology, history, and religion teachers use a Jigsaw strategy as students assume responsibility for teaching

portions of the content to their peers. Other cooperative learning strategies employed are Think-Pair-Share, Round Robin, and Player/Coach. Journal writing, reflection, and self-assessment are demonstrated in religion, music, band, art, and English classes. I.B. students must develop portfolios in several subject areas. Sophomores model the Socratic Seminar strategy as they employ critical reading skills in the College Prep course. Active learning is evident as students participate in biology and history debates, Gallery Walks in English and religion, and learning stations in foreign language classes. Using a variety of strategies permits students of varying ability levels to actively construct meaning via experience-based learning activities.

After much thought and discussion regarding the school goals for summer reading, the Academic Council recommended that the summer reading format be revised to better meet student needs. Using results from recent educational research regarding student interests and self-selection, the committee established the current design during 1997 for implementation the following school year. In an effort to model life-long reading, faculty and support staff suggest the names of books they would be willing to share with students in discussion groups. The Media Specialist purchases each book, students peruse the books for several weeks, and then select two books of their choice for summer reading. The first Friday of the new school year is now Literary Day. Students participate in two book discussions led by faculty and/or staff members. Pleasure reading has taken on a whole new meaning for students. Faculty and staff anecdotally note that students are well prepared and genuinely interested in the books they have self-selected. The program remains highly successful with a passing rate of 99.7%.

How does a coherent approach to professional development for teachers and other staff ensure their ability to implement effectively the school's curriculum, instructional strategies, and support system?

In an effort to better connect teacher learning with student achievement, two fulltime staff developers understand the research base of the content, recommend various approaches, and present accurate, up-to-date information to faculty and staff. Both staff developers engage in continuous learning. Working with department resource teachers, the staff developers promote job-embedded learning, collaboration, and joint lesson planning. Since 1997 with implementation of the block schedule, the workday was redesigned to give teachers 90 minutes of planning time a day. Also, in order to find more time for teachers to learn, the start of school on

Mondays was moved up to 8:30 for faculty, department, and collaborative meetings. Teachers are encouraged to assume leadership roles to help determine changes in instruction, curriculum and assessment, to act as mentors that provide professional and social support for teachers new to Good Counsel, and to act as facilitators to provide current information to their colleagues. Teachers attend state and national conferences, local workshops and participate in electronic networking.

Examples of in-house training include a technology workshop dedicated to the new grading and attendance program, a sexual harassment counselor who presented law and policy to the faculty, peer-led workshops from Web design and Internet use in the classroom to classroom management and methods.

Samples of outside professional training include annual attendance at International Baccalaureate Conferences held worldwide, attendance at workshops held at the Washington, D.C., Lab School, and active participation in professional organizations. These organizations include the Association of Curriculum and Development, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council for Social Studies, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Greater Washington Association of Foreign Language Teachers, National Science Teachers Association, and a science teacher group that meets at Catholic University periodically throughout the academic year. Each year since 1999, Good Counsel has sent an average of 55 teachers (close to 75% of the teaching force) to off-site conferences or workshops. Upon returning to school, the teachers share information gained with their department and/or the entire faculty.

Over the last five years the staff development budget (for professional development and tuition reimbursement) has grown from $18,000 to $122,000. This does not include AP, IB, or Ryken training for which there is an additional $75,000 for curriculum development.

How does the school tailor professional development and support to address the differences in career experience or professional responsibility?

The award winning New Teacher program at Our Lady of Good Counsel provides support, information and materials so that each new teacher can be successful during the first years of teaching. Other objectives are to create an atmosphere of collegiality among the new teachers, to provide insight into the best practices, to offer details on educational resources and to create opportunities to discuss the major concerns and successes of the beginning teaching experience.

Initial support begins with New Teacher Orientation, a four-day session in August before veteran teachers return to school. New teachers are introduced to

techniques by educator Harry Wong, E-Grades and E-Class systems, their mentors, and strategies to implement in their classrooms.

The second phase of the New Teacher Program is ongoing support. This portion includes all activities following the August orientation. Components include: bi-weekly first-year new teacher meetings, monthly meetings with second and third-year teachers, a staff development newsletter, on- and off-site professional training, tuition reimbursement, after-school mini-workshops, check-out resource library (300+ books), video and audio tapes, classroom support and mentor colleagues.

At the close of the 2000-01 school year, teachers were given professional time to personally reflect on their teaching using Charlotte Danielson's Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching rubric. Faculty were asked to review personal goals that were set for the year, in light of what actually took place. Then, with rubric in hand, teachers rated themselves as to areas of strength and weakness. Results were kept private, but teachers were encouraged to use the reflections to develop goals for the coming school year (2001-02) over the summer months.

With the introduction of the new administrative software, five support staff members were given the opportunity to attend training specific to their jobs and implementation of the software. Additionally, counselors frequently attend conferences relating to learning disabilities, school resiliency, and college counseling. Most recently, counselors have attended a workshop on crises management for Washington Metro Area private schools.

St. Joseph's Academy

Baton Rouge, LA

All Girls High School
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1991, 1996, and 2002
Special Emphasis Award: Technology 2002
http://www.sjabr.org

Previously Recognized School

What major changes and improvements have taken place since the school was last recognized?

Since recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in1996, St. Joseph's Academy has made the following improvements:

Academic Audit and Curriculum Redesign. Under the direction of Finlay McQuade, co-author of "How to Make a Better School," we have completed an academic audit that was begun in 1994. This six-year process has resulted in a redesign of the SJA curriculum to be cohesive. The main thrust is now to teach for understanding rather than recall. Departments work together now to make learning a continuous process from one class to the next. Some classes, such as environmental science, are team-taught by a science and a math teacher, who are able to relate the two areas and show the importance of using math in science class.

Implementation of Notebook Computers. In 1998, SJA decided to implement a notebook computer program as part of the curriculum redesign. The first-year teachers received computers and extensive training on how to implement the tool into their lessons. In 1999 students had the option of purchasing a notebook computer, and the program is now mandatory. Students are now fully immersed in technology and view the computer as a tool that is as essential for learning as pencils and paper once were.

Teachers apply the use of computer technology throughout the curriculum. For example, social studies classes interact with students across the country using The Electronic Model Congress; science teachers take their students to "The Chemistry Place" via the world wide web, giving them the ability to visualize what was once only on paper; and math teachers use programs like Geometer's Sketchpad and Stella to bring a greater understanding to mathematical concepts.

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Computer applications classes no longer simply teach students "how to do computers," but rather how to use them as a tool for learning. Technology classes are expanded to include web mastering, multimedia, and computer troubleshooting; many students, alumnae and even parents have the opportunity to become A+ certified and work as a technician in our Help desk. Three recent alumnae who attend LSU recently received their Compaq Certification. St. Joseph's Academy is the only high school in America to receive "Self Maintainer" status from Compaq Corporation, the supplier of our computers.

Beginning in August 2001, Blackboard software, which support course design as well as communication, was integrated into our program after being piloted last year. Teachers are required to post major tests as well as the course online.

Building Pennington Science Center. In 1999, St. Joseph's Academy opened the Irene W. Pennington Science Center, which includes six state-of-the art laboratories that are used for chemistry, biology, physics and environmental science classes. Since the opening of this new facility, our young women have taken a greater interest in science and for the past two years a group of students has qualified to participate in the International Science Fair. Groups of students have also won awards in NASA's "Design a Mission to Mars" competition.

Reducing Class Size/Expanded Guidance Department/CHOOSE WELL. Although we have expanded our enrollment to allow for the growing Catholic school population in our area, we have committed ourselves to lowering the number of students per classroom to a maximum of 24 students. This allows us to continue building personal relationships with students and give the personal touch.

In addition, we have expanded our guidance department to four full-time counselors with one designated for each grade level. This has allowed us to expand programs such as Academic Enrichment and Academic Support and to implement new programs like CHOOSE WELL. The first two of these programs address students with academic or social problems with mandatory weekly group counseling sessions and weekly progress reports. Since the implementation of these programs, the graduation rate of each senior class has been 100 percent. CHOOSE WELL is a comprehensive program designed to support students in developing effective decision-making skills. Currently, there are two major elements of the program in place. One provides students and faculty the opportunity to identify their thinking and behavioral preferences and to integrate that information in making more effective choices in their learning and responding. The other component is our program that is designed to assist faculty and students in understanding and managing stress in their lives.

Has the administration or staff had any interactions with other schools to share some of the successful strategies and practices?

Our principal serves on many boards and committees, including the Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce, where she is able to meet with other community leaders to discuss issues such as technology. In 2001 a group of educational leaders from St. James Parish, a poor, rural community east of Baton Rouge, visited St. Joseph's Academy for a day to learn about our notebook computer program and technology immersion. The group of 30 took guided tours of the campus and listened to presentations given by our students on the impact technology has had on their learning.

With the redesign of our curriculum, Blake Ives of the LSU College of Business wrote a case study on our school. That case study is now posted on our website and available for us to share with colleagues around the world. Our principal attends state and national conferences. This gives her the opportunity to share our story and network with other educational leaders. In 2001 the school received the "Catholic Schools for Tomorrow Innovations in Technology" Award from *Today's Catholic Teacher*, and was highlighted in their monthly magazine as an exemplary school. The school was also featured in the *Southern Growth* magazine, which is the publication of the Southern Growth Policies Board. This year the school is partnering with LSU to conduct a study through a $500,000 National Science Foundation grant. This study will allow us to identify factors that influence the career decisions of young women, particularly when it comes to studying in the fields of technology and information systems. We will, of course, share the results of this study with others in education.

Special Emphasis Areas: Technology

The school's use of technology supports both instruction and school management. It has the following characteristics:

Vision and Planning: A comprehensive technology plan was initially written in the summer of 1998. This plan has been continually updated and revised to meet the changes in technology. The plan grew out of the need for more complex tools to support the teaching of higher-level skills as well as research that indicated that girls are reticent to embrace technology unless they have easy access to hardware. The keystone to the plan was the preparation of teachers to assure that technology would be fully integrated into the curriculum.

To sustain this vision, SJA has a technology committee made up of the school principal, academic coordinator, information systems director, technology

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service coordinator, technology implementation coordinator, school librarian, the business manager, a team of five faculty members, and university and business consultants. This team meets whenever major changes are anticipated or for an annual review.

The technology team is composed of those who directly manage and sustain the program: the information systems director, the service coordinator, the implementation coordinator and the school librarian. This group meets regularly to assess the management of the program and to plan for improvements and services. The principal attends when needed.

In addition, a technology council meets once a month to discuss the impact of technology on student learning and the curriculum. This group is composed of faculty members and is chaired by the technology implementation coordinator, who brings information from the meeting to the monthly technology team meetings.

Instructional Integration: The new technologies (for example, multimedia computers, laptops, wireless access, hand-held devices, web-based learning resources and distance learning) have been integrated into all phases of the curriculum. Each teacher and student has access to technology and is committed to mastery and integration of technology as a learning tool. Emphasis is placed on developing higher-order thinking skills and information management skills.

Every student and teacher has a notebook computer and access to the school's network, which support a campus-wide wireless system. Teachers have implemented lessons across the curriculum to integrate technology into their everyday lessons and continue to revise and update these lessons. Through individual and group activities, class assignments and projects, students use their knowledge and skills to develop conceptual understandings in specific curriculum areas while using technology as a tool to complete these assignments. Students are challenged to use higher level thinking skills when making connections between concepts and events and then to apply concepts to each situation by using technology to complete spreadsheets, charts and graphs, tables, data collection, concept mapping and computational modeling to come up with solutions.

Professional Development: There is high quality and continuous professional development for all personnel with a focus on integrating the technology into the curriculum and student learning. Faculty and staff have an open invitation to schedule classes to learn new skills or raise their mastery level. If the class that is needed is not being offered, it will be as soon as a small group is recruited for the topic. The implementation coordinator is responsible to meet these needs.

Professional development focused on integrating technology into the curriculum to raise the level of student learning has been the keystone of the technology program at SJA and has always been viewed as the most important

factor in driving the success of the technology program. At the start of the technology initiative in 1998, before students or teachers were ever asked to integrate technology into their classroom activities, teachers and staff were involved in an extensive professional development program regarding technology. Teachers were expected, as part of their contract, to prove their technology proficiency level through a series of technology proficiency tests and participation in technology classes. Professional development requirements continue to be set each year for all faculty and staff.

Technical Assistance and Support: Ongoing and accessible technical assistance and support is readily available for teachers, students, staff and other educational personnel.

Technical assistance and support started three years ago with a small desk in a comer of the library and was staffed by technology teachers on a part-time basis. This service now has grown to a technical support team led by a technology support coordinator, help desk manager and team of trained students and alumnae. The help desk is open five days a week, 12 months a year, eight or more hours a day and provides technical expertise for hardware and software issues. It is centrally located and accessible to the entire school community.

Home and Community Connectivity: Technology helps to support interactive school connections with home and community, and to extend opportunities for learning beyond the school day. Blackboard was adopted school-wide in August 2001. It is software dedicated to individual courses, a school calendar, and class tests and assignments. Parents may use Blackboard to see student expectations for different courses, specific assignments, and, in some cases, grades.

Blackboard is password protected and students have access only to the information pertinent to them. Each faculty member maintains the course information for his or her curriculum area. This software has greatly increased the communication between the teachers and students with email and discussion boards becoming increasingly more utilized. All faculty and staff have a school-supported email account and can interact with students and parents on a regular basis. Email has become the main method of communicating within the school community. In addition, a school website is maintained to provide comprehensive information about the school. There is a link to the SJA Case Study from the school web page.

Extending time beyond the school day is one of the many positive "side effects" of having the exclusive use of a notebook computer. Students and faculty bring their notebook computer home each day and are able to use it to complete assignments, to do research, to plan ahead or for recreational and communication purposes. Students and faculty needing Internet access are provided help in setting up a free Internet access account to use at home with their notebook computer.

Technology is also used in all extra-curricular activities and sporting events. When students are absent, it is simple for them to access their assignments and the class information for the day(s) missed.

This is proving to be a valuable asset. Technology courses are offered throughout the school year to parents and alumnae in the afternoon and evening hours. Courses also are offered in the summer to elementary school students. There is a two-week course during the summer that is required of all incoming freshmen. In this course, students are introduced to, and expected to master, the technology skills they will use during the first quarter of school. These skills are always taught in the context of a regular assignment. Computer skills are never taught in isolation. This program has received national as well as local recognition, and visitors come regularly to study the integration of technology at St. Joseph's. A process has been developed to accommodate visitors in a way that is beneficial to them and, at the same time, minimizes disruptions for the students and faculty.

St. Ursula Academy

Cincinnati, OH

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2002
http://www.saintursula.org

Special Emphasis Areas: Special Education

St. Ursula Academy's Learning Disabilities Program is in its twentieth year of operation. Since its inception, the department has participated in the school's regular evaluative process through the NCA and OCSAA. In addition to the periodic school reviews, the department underwent a separate self study and external review in 1996. The external review team described the program as "...strong and effective and one of only a very few successful programs of its kind." The department has conducted periodic surveys of program graduates to not only determine their satisfaction with the program and their preparation for college, but also to solicit suggestions for improvement. The most recent survey was conducted in spring 2001. Over 44% of those contacted responded to the survey. Consistent with previous surveys, the respondents rated the program as excellent (58%) or good (42%). Respondents highly rated their preparation for college as excellent (33.3%), good (50%) and satisfactory (12.5%). The fourteen LD students in the Class of 2001 are an excellent example of the program's success. Two are National Merit Commended students; one was recognized at graduation with a school award of honor for initiative and Christian service, and another received a department award. The students earned twenty-three scholarships and have been accepted to Clemson, Northwestern, St. Louis University, Indiana University, The Ohio State University Honors Program, Michigan State, Loyola University, Xavier University, and several other universities throughout the United States.

A parent's first meeting with St. Ursula Academy occurs in the spring of the eighth grade. Parents and their daughter meet with an Academy faculty member to review the freshman schedule and other important school information. The freshmen in the LD Program and their parents meet with one of the three faculty members in the LD Department not only to review the freshman schedule but also to answer any questions or concerns the parents or their daughter might have

about the educational program and modifications for their daughter.

Within the first two weeks of the school year, Parent Night is held. This evening provides parents with an opportunity to meet with their daughter's first term teachers and receive an overview of the class. In addition, an orientation program for parents of freshmen in the LD Program is held at the beginning of the school year. The policies and procedures of the LD Program are presented, and parents have the opportunity to ask questions about the program. Parents are informed about the orientation program through the *Parent Bulletin* and an invitation mailed to their home.

At midterm, each student receives two copies of a midterm report to take home. The LD Department also receives a copy of each midterm. Each classroom has its own telephone which assists the communication process. Teachers also may be contacted by email, which may be accessed through the school's Web page.

The college process begins in junior year, and the Guidance Department assists both students and parents in the process. College Night features an Admissions Director from a local college who gives an overview of the college search. In addition, the Guidance Department sponsors a program for the juniors in the LD Department and their parents to acquaint them with the college process and their search for colleges which have special programs and services. The program includes a presentation from a college official affiliated with a university LD Program. Former parents are present to recount their experiences, answer questions and offer advice. The guidance counselors also encourage a meeting with each student and her parents to discuss college options and interests. At the request of the student or parent, the LD Coordinator may attend the meeting to assist in the college process.

St. Ursula Academy also assists parents with special needs. The school is handicapped accessible with elevators, ramps and appropriate restrooms. Whenever off campus facilities are used (e.g. Music Hall for Graduation and the Northern Kentucky Convention Center for Victorian Christmas), they are handicapped accessible. A few years ago, St. Ursula Academy had a family with parents who are deaf. Signing interpreters were provided for Graduation and other activities the parents attended. In addition, choral classes were taught to sign songs for the annual Christmas Carols and Spring Concert.

Students are evaluated prior to their admission to the LD Program. Area psychologists, educational diagnosticians, and speech & language pathologists conduct the educational testing. Most students who enter the LD Program apply to the program prior to their matriculation to St. Ursula Academy. Eighth grade students seeking admission to St. Ursula Academy's Learning Disabilities Program must take the entrance test and submit the following to the LD Program Coordinator by November 30: an educational evaluation completed within the past two years, results of previous educational testing, recommendations from teachers

and tutors, and grade school records.

The most frequent way that current St. Ursula Academy students are identified for intervention is through the quarterly Grade Level Meetings which follow the issuance of midterms. Suggestions for resolving problems might include meeting with the student and parents, referral for testing, or setting the student up with a peer or professional tutor. It is the responsibility of the Guidance Department to implement and follow through on the process. Guidelines have been established for identifying and diagnosing students already enrolled at the Academy:

- The initial suggestion that a student may have a learning disability may come from the student, parents, teachers, counselors, or administrators.
- The available data are read and discussed by the counselors and LD Coordinator and an appropriate recommendation is made.
- A student may be referred for further testing if appropriate.
- Testing results are analyzed and the LD Coordinator, in conjunction with the counselors and administrator, decides placement.

Out of eighty-six students currently being served in the LD Program, sixty-five (76%) entered as freshmen, and eighteen (21%) entered after they were enrolled at the Academy.

Individual assessment is used as a basis for planning the student's curriculum and for informing teachers about the necessary classroom accommodations for the student. The services provided by St. Ursula Academy's LD Program are designed to provide appropriate accommodations for the student. In some cases a student may require additional reading tutoring, subject tutoring, or language therapy that is arranged for outside of school time. Informal diagnosis occurs daily by noting errors and difficulties that students encounter with tests, homework, and assignments. Students are re-evaluated in the spring/summer of their junior year so that there is current diagnostic information for the college application process. This testing is done by area psychologists/educational diagnosticians with St. Ursula Academy assuming the full costs of the re-evaluation.

The LD Department has given several in-depth in-services to the St. Ursula Academy faculty. These in-services have focused on the learning needs of the LD students and modifications that teachers need to make in their classrooms to ensure the success of the LD student. In addition, a meeting is held with new teachers each year to acquaint them with the LD Program, its policies and procedures and its services. Each teacher of a student in the LD Program receives an Educational and Accommodation Plan for the student. However, there have been a number of in-services over the years on topics such as integrating the arts into the classroom, technology and teaching in the block, which have presented instructional strategies that are of great benefit to the LD student. In 1990-1991, St. Ursula Academy was

fortunate to have an artist in residence. Stephanie Cooper, a sculptress, worked with science and English classes as well as the art classes. It was an eye-opening experience to see students who struggled to explain the themes of poems in a five-paragraph essay express it so aptly through sculpture. Since that time, St. Ursula Academy has had several in-services on incorporating the arts into the classroom. Sixteen teachers representing religion, English, math, foreign language, science, and the fine arts have taken advantage of training through the Association for the Advancement of Arts Education. The benefit of this training for the LD student is that teachers learn that there are different ways of learning, thinking, and expressing what one knows. The in-services on integrating technology into the curriculum have also proven to be beneficial. The computer is invaluable to the LD student, and when teachers incorporate its use into their classes, it enhances the student's ability to understand and express herself. The in-services dealing with teaching in the Four Bell Day have included many excellent teaching strategies. Probably the most helpful strategy to the LD student is that teachers incorporate a number of activities within the eighty-eight minute period. It is much easier for a student with ADD to survive and flourish in a class with several activities than to sit through a forty-five minute lecture. Another benefit has been the increase in cooperative learning. Not only does this help the LD student, but it also is more indicative of the world of work where employees often work together in teams.

The LD Department holds membership in the International Dyslexia Association. The LD Program Coordinator is a former Vice-President and a current Board member of the Ohio Valley Branch of the International Dyslexia Association (OVB/IDA), and she recently completed her tenth year as the Branch Program Chair responsible for planning the annual Fall and Spring Conferences. The conferences, which are for parents as well as educators, focus on the educational, social and familial needs of the child, adolescent, or adult with dyslexia, another learning disability or ADD. This association with OVB/IDA enables the LD faculty to be on the cutting edge of research in the field of dyslexia and learning disabilities and readily access the expertise and advice of nationally recognized authorities. Over the past several years the LD Department budget has included provisions for the purchase of videotapes and books dealing with dyslexia, ADD and learning disabilities. These resources are then made available to faculty and parents. The LD Program Coordinator is also a board member of SP-ARC (Seton Professional/Parent Archdiocesan Resource Center), an educational center which provides resources and in-service opportunities for both parents and professionals. This allows the LD Department staff to provide more resources and opportunities to parents. St. Ursula Academy participated in the first annual LD Fair (May 2001) sponsored by the Springer School and Center and the Ohio Valley Branch of the International Dyslexic Association. St. Ursula Academy has institutional membership in Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic that enables the

LD Department to obtain taped copies of current textbooks and novels. The school works with several area psychologists, speech and language pathologists and tutors to ensure proper evaluative procedures and services for the students in the LD Program. St. Ursula Academy also has had the opportunity to participate in research conducted by area university professors on learning disabilities and foreign language acquisition. The results of this research have been published in the Annals of Dyslexia and the Foreign Language Annals.

When St. Ursula Academy first considered an LD Program, the Academy consulted with Springer School, a private elementary school for children with learning disabilities. They were very helpful in helping St. Ursula Academy develop its program and services. Since that time, St. Ursula Academy has been able to provide that assistance to other schools. Several elementary and high schools have consulted with St. Ursula Academy on developing appropriate programs and services. Elementary schools also request that St. Ursula Academy students serve as speakers for the Everybody Counts Program, where they share with fifth graders what it is like to have a learning disability.

Trinity High School

Camp Hill, PA

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
http://www.trinityhs.k12.pa.us/

Mission/Vision Statement

Trinity High School offers quality secondary education in the Catholic tradition of values and excellence to young men and women in grades 9-12 of the West Shore area of Harrisburg. In partnership with the family and community, the administration, faculty, and staff are committed to teaching skills necessary for life-long learning in a safe, caring, dynamic environment. Trinity recognizes the students' uniqueness by challenging them to achieve their personal best in all that they do and to share their gifts and talents through service to parish and community.

Strategies

1. We will integrate Catholic Christian truths and values across the curriculum while working to improve our spiritual formation opportunities for our students and other stakeholders.
2. We will develop programs and opportunities to help students grow in self-esteem and self-confidence and achieve their personal best.
3. We will provide the necessary resources and opportunities for our students to achieve technological competence.
4. We will provide resources and opportunities to promote the continuous professional development of our faculty.
5. We will strengthen our service program.
6. We will develop collaborative partnerships with the community to enrich the teaching/learning environment and promote our cultural understanding.

Growth Objectives

- By the year 2002, the percentage of students scoring above the mean (500) on the math SAT I will increase by 10%. (Baseline data: Class of 1997, 70% scored above 500)

- By the year 1999, the percentage of seniors achieving full competency on the elementary and middle level performance indicators in the Indicators of Quality Information Technology Systems will increase by 25 percentage points. (Baseline data: Class of 1997, 47% achieved full competency with an average score of 2.5 to 3.0)
- By the year 2002, the percentage of seniors scoring excellent in the area of Scripture in the religious knowledge section of the ACRE (Assessment of Catholic Religious Education), will increase by 10 percentage points. (Baseline data: Class of 1997, 49% scored excellent)

Indicators of Academic Success

What alternative assessments of student performance do you use?

The most common methods of alternative assessments used are portfolios and performance-based assessments. Portfolios are used in the English, Computer Science, and Family and Consumer Science Departments. Performance-based assessment is used in the Science, Computer Science, Physical Education, and Family and Consumer Science Departments. Two examples of portfolio use and one example of performance-based assessment follow.

Portfolio Assessment

Basic Computer Applications Classes – (Elective full credit course. All students are required to take this course or .5 credit course.) Students create a stock portfolio to demonstrate their expertise in word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations. In the portfolio they are to purchase 10 stocks available in the NYSE with a virtual bankroll of $15,000. First, they investigate some stocks over the Internet, and then they establish a portfolio through My.Yahoo so that they can track the performance of their stock over several weeks. After their investigation, the students use Microsoft Excel to calculate the average price of their stocks, the percentage change in value, the dollar change in value, and the total increase/decrease in the value of their portfolio. They also create charts that graph the performance of their stock and the composition of their portfolio. Then they use Microsoft Word to write a three-page report that compares their best and worst investments, including the graphs they have created and pictures they have downloaded from the Internet illustrating their best and worst stocks. Using Microsoft PowerPoint, they create a slide show of their stock portfolio. It must also include downloaded pictures and their graphs. They must also include sounds or music, animation, and slide transitions. A detailed rubric has been developed to

assess the project.

Sophomore English – The writing portfolio's main thrust is to show the writer his/her strengths and weaknesses over a period of time. It gives the writer a full picture of him/herself as a writer so that difficulties with some assignments are balanced with successes in others. Assessment of work is done using appropriate rubrics through: teacher/student conferencing, student/student conferencing, and group editing. A final portfolio PowerPoint presentation is done in the sophomore honors class. The honors class has been doing the portfolio project for three years. Evidence of the success of the program can be seen in the number of students who received Scholastic Writing Awards in 1999: 11 Gold Keys, 2 Silver Keys, 1 Certificate of Merit, and 2 National Gold Key winners.

Performance-Based Assessment

Family and Consumer Science Classes: In addition to pencil and paper tests, students are required to demonstrate the skills learned in these classes. The following are examples of these projects.

Child Development Class: The students are required to write a children's book. The book is evaluated according to: age appropriateness (topic, text, pictures), and child appeal (colorful, picture size, word usage, interactive quality).

International Foods Class: The students are required to develop reports and bulletin boards on countries. The project is evaluated according to: organization of information, authenticity, completeness, and attractiveness.

Clothing Class: The students are required to make a pair of boxer shorts. The finished product is evaluated according to: seams and seams finishing, waistline casing, hems, threads clipped and shorts pressed, ability to work independently. Extra credit is given for the inclusion of a pocket.

Ursuline School in New Rochelle

New Rochelle, NY

All Girls High School
National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1985, 1996 and 2002
http://www.ursuline.pvt.k12.ny.us

School Organization and Culture

What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does the school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

The close relationships among students and teachers is one of the hallmarks of Ursuline, and we hope that evidence of such relationships is apparent throughout this report. Some relationships develop in the context of programs such as Advisement, Personal Development, counseling, Substance Abuse Education, and college guidance. In these instances, the adult is often a facilitator and confidante, as well as advisor and counselor.

Other programs and occasions foster a more collaborative relationship among adults and students. Faculty and Peer Counselors work together in planning Personal Development activities. Faculty and Peer Ministers together plan retreats for grades 6 through 10. Extracurricular activities and sports provide for informal exchange. Events such as Field Day or Halloween enable students and faculty to have fun together. The school's European trip enables students and teachers to enjoy time together, even though teachers have serious responsibilities chaperoning.

We also cannot stress enough that care and concern are evident all day long, and often long after the day ends. It is not unusual for a teacher to phone a student who has seemed upset; a class might throw a baby shower for a teacher. On a more serious note, when we have had a student die, or when there has been a national tragedy such as the World Trade Center disaster, we prefer to open rather than close school, including on weekends and during the summer. Faculty, students,

families and friends have gravitated here to grieve together, to comfort and support one another. Very simply, Ursuline is a second home and family for us all.

Peer climate in the school is one of support and caring. It is often students who bring a friend to a counselor, or who bring friends or themselves to mediation. It is they who ask what they can do for a family who is experiencing serious difficulty. Even years later, alumnae call us when there is very good or very bad news, and they may ask to use the school as a gathering place.

When we hear that students' needs have not been met or that a student has felt hurt or excluded, we try not to engage in denial. Thus, when our Peer Mediators made suggestions as to how we could continue to meet student needs weeks after the World Trade Center tragedy, we listened and, with them, made some plans for the remainder of the year. In the case of specific tensions, we use our Mediation Process. In the past three years, there have been 79 student-student mediations, six student-teacher mediations, four faculty-faculty mediations, and one parent/student with parent/student mediation. The increase in mediations from 22 the first year to 40 last year is a positive sign of the acceptance of this process. Two examples illustrate the process. In one case, a student felt a teacher "had it in for her." The teacher felt the student was being deliberately disrespectful. The situation was complicated by ethnic differences. Mediation enabled both to share their perceptions, correct erroneous assumptions, and agree to modify behavior. In another situation, some 6th graders felt taunted by the "cool" group. In mediation, both groups eventually arrived at a "contract" in which they agreed to avoid some specific behaviors and to create ways to get to know one another better.

For problems involving a larger group, we design another means. For example, because we are concerned that students tend to be verbally more hurtful through e-mail than in person, we have planned, for 2001-2002, discussions and assemblies with speakers to address the ethical and legal dimensions of the problem. Clearly, having students sign an acceptable use policy is not sufficient.

Previously Recognized Schools

What major changes and improvements have taken place since the school was last recognized?

Curriculum: Improvements reflect both significant change and ongoing evolution. We have made a commitment to correcting a long-term deficiency in music, drama, and dance offerings. With the completion of the arts center, we will be adding courses in these areas beginning in January 2002. Technology has been extensively integrated into the curriculum as students are required to use word processing,

Excel spreadsheets and graphs, PowerPoint presentations, math and science software, and the Internet for research, writing, presentations, data analysis, lab reports and art projects. Introduction to Computers is required of all new students. Additional courses in computer graphic design and computer science have been added. All 9th grade students begin their study of science with biology, ensuring that all students take biology, chemistry and physics. AP Physics and Marine Science have been added. The Authentic Science Research program has been established, leading to original research done in a professional setting, working with a mentor. AP European history has been added and replaces the global history course for the brightest and most highly motivated sophomores. A new math curriculum has been introduced with an algebra, geometry, precalculus, calculus sequence. By adding a level of Italian each year, we have increased our Italian offerings to four years, with plans for five. The English curriculum has been revised so that American literature is studied in the same year as American history. The 9th grade religion curriculum has been revised to incorporate more scripture and sacramental material. Elective courses in journalism and philosophy have been added. A CPR / First Aid course has been added. Study skills courses have been introduced in grades 6 and 7. Interdisciplinary summer and supplementary reading lists have been prepared at all grade levels.

Assessment: As a member of the New York State Association of Independent Schools, we have decided to join the other 92 members and discontinue giving Regents examinations. The school has not in 30 or more years given a Regents diploma, and has only used Regents exams in subjects where the department believed the exam was relevant and challenging. Recent changes in these exams have led us to believe they would result in lowered standards for our students. Instead, school departmental exams were introduced in 2000-2001. The process of developing these exams is being modified and assessed. The decision not to give Regents also frees us to revise our curriculum so that interdisciplinary work, in-depth study of selected topics, and the greater integration of technology are all possible.

Technology: In 1997, the decision was made to require every student to use a laptop in her studies. The program was phased in with every incoming class and all teachers and students now using laptops. Wireless technology, installed in 1999, makes it possible to access the Internet and email with a PCMCIA card from anywhere in the school. In February 2000, the school subscribed to Edgate.com, an on-line educational Web site that hosts our local learning community, provides access to educational Web sites, and provides for home-school communication. All hardware and software in the computer lab, library, science labs and classrooms have been upgraded several times. Professional development has been extensive and has incorporated in-house classes and individual help, on-site workshops by Edgate, and administrative and faculty attendance at national, regional and local

workshops.

Facilities: Five science laboratories have been fully renovated into state-of-the-art facilities. The athletic field has been reconstructed and a sprinkling system installed. Outside lighting has been enhanced. A new arts center is under construction, scheduled for completion in January 2002. It will house a 300-seat theatre, classrooms, two/three music rooms, one/two dance studios, four new art rooms, a darkroom, and two classrooms.

Staff and Administration: The school has joined the New York State Association of Independent Schools, the National Association of Principals of Schools for Girls, and the National Coalition of Girls' Schools, affording rich professional networking with other private girls' schools. Within school, the growth in various programs has led to an increase in staff. A separate Computer Department has been established. A coordinator for the Reading and Language Development program was appointed. We have begun to hire staff for music and drama. We have reinstated faculty lunch meetings with the administration to exchange information and discuss any concerns that have arisen. E-mail affords quick and frequent communication. Faculty meetings are less business oriented and include more time for reflection and brainstorming. The Development Office has become increasingly professional, enabling us to launch our first capital campaign. An Alumnae Board has been established. The Finance Office is using professional accounting software. We have developed a five year financial projection encompassing the new building, tuition projections, fundraising projections, faculty salary increases, and financial aid / scholarship increases.

Cocurricular and student leadership: Through the annual Make-a-Difference Day, all seniors do community service and a number continue to volunteer where they worked that day. Activities concerning issues of diversity have been added to the freshman orientation and Peer Counseling and Peer Mediation curricula. Music and drama have grown greatly as co-curricular activities. There are now about 100 students in band. The number of interscholastic sports and teams continues to grow with the addition of golf, field hockey, junior varsity soccer, and varsity "B" basketball.

Safety issues: The school owns more vans and small school buses so that students do not have to drive to athletic events and club activities. Doors not readily visible to staff members are locked and an entry system has been established. Visitors' passes have been instituted. The back gate to the parking lot is locked during the day, limiting access to the campus. A security person is at the front door after school and in the evenings. Evacuation and lockdown drills have been instituted.

Charlotte Latin School

Charlotte, NC

National Association of Independent Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1986 and 2000
http://www.charlottelatin.org

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

What other content areas play essential roles in your schoolwide curriculum goals?

All sixth graders take Enrichment, a class which focuses on "learning to learn" skills, and is the base for all learning in the sixth grade. Students work towards developing their potential, creativity, leadership skills, and problem-solving abilities. Art for sixth graders is taught during this class, with a block of time arranged for specific projects taught by art instructors. Technology skills are integrated with the support of a computer instructor, and library and research skills are led by the Middle School librarian and are related to Humanities studies and projects. Instruction in study skills is ongoing; topics covered include note-taking, skimming and scanning in reading, selecting and highlighting essential information, and how to approach homework. Students also determine their learning styles and develop strategies to enhance their study time.

Other activities include inventing, constructing and playing board games, creative song writing, and an environmental independent study project. Time is provided for research and writing of Humanities International Day projects, which involve group research, making maps, and working on oral presentations. Dramatic readings of plays and time for silent reading enhance reading skill development.

Engineering

Several engineering classes are offered to seventh and eighth graders as elective courses. Students study a variety of engineering topics through hands-on, minds-on learning, using everything from computers to model rockets. Students learn the importance of math as they try to solve problems and meet engineering

challenges. These electives encourage all students to explore engineering as a career, and reinforce the concept that math and science play an important and relevant role in all of our lives.

The focus of Civil and Flight Engineering is on civil and aeronautical engineering topics, including energy, structural forces, flight basics, and aviation design. Electrical and Mechanical Engineering focuses on electronics, simple machines, and robotics.

Engineering for Girls combines elements of the Civil/Flight and Electrical/Mechanical courses and offers a special focus on learning styles and a supportive environment suited for adolescent females.

Advanced Engineering, offered to eighth graders, provides an opportunity for students to investigate further concepts from previous engineering classes. Students help to determine the topics to be covered.

Active Teaching and Learning

How are teaching practices and learning experiences in your school consistent with current knowledge about successful teaching and learning?

All Middle School are expected to achieve. They are held to consistent standards by the faculty, who expects them to meet those standards successfully. Classroom standards and expectations related to teaching practices and learning experiences are enforced in a variety of ways. In the sixth grade, homework and responsibility policies are consistent in every class. Sixth and seventh graders are taught to use a required planbook for recording and organizing assignments. Many seventh and eighth grade teachers provide syllabi, which clearly state expectations, homework, and classroom activities. Students can demonstrate achievement and mastery in many different ways, including written evaluations, individual and group projects, and oral presentations. Middle School instructors consistently offer extra help and tutoring on an individual or group basis, while outside tutors are recommended for those students who are below grade level in basic skills. The students, parents, instructors, administrators, and support personnel work as a team to ensure successful achievement for all students.

Our teachers and administrators understand that students display multiple intelligences, and therefore learn in a variety of ways. For example, unique engineering courses practice "hands-on" learning by building and designing bridges and airplanes. The school is equipped with three computer laboratories

that are used by English and foreign language classes for process writing, by social studies classes for historical simulation games, and by science classes for forecasting and tracking weather patterns. Teamwork and cooperative learning are promoted; the sixth grade semester-long International Day project and the seventh grade medieval guilds are excellent examples of pairs or teams of students working collaboratively over a long period of time. Most learning experiences are presented so that those who are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners can all benefit.

The faculty is keenly aware of the continuing research on brain development and the implications for middle grades teaching and learning. We are involved in an ongoing dialogue about early adolescent development and the learning process. In our classroom practices we are constantly striving to ensure manageable levels of challenge—challenges that are balanced with support, to provide variety in content, approaches, and ways students may respond, and to help students link new information to prior knowledge. We know that emotions play a critical role in the learning process for this age group; therefore, we are conscious of maintaining a calm, joyous environment where appropriate humor is encouraged.

School, Family, and Community Involvement

What are the goals and priorities of your school, family, and community partnerships?

One of Charlotte Latin Middle School's goals is to educate and inspire in students a sense of responsibility to their community and to nurture the realization that they are in a unique position to help others. The school recognizes needs in the community in the areas of homelessness, senior citizens, and at-risk children, and projects have been integrated into the curriculum to address these needs. Each grade level team, with the support and assistance of the administration and parents, plans, coordinates, and implements age-appropriate service projects to accomplish these goals.

The seventh and eighth grade teams plan a fall and spring Service Day where students go into the community to provide volunteer services for at least twenty different community agencies, including Crisis Assistance Ministry, Metrolina Food Bank, Head Start programs, and others. Additionally, during the October weeklong Book Fair, Middle School parents sponsor a book collection drive called The Giving Tree. These new and used books are donated to various organizations such as the Battered Women's Shelter. During the holiday season, the sixth grade brings in gifts to fill stockings for needy children. Each year eighth graders provide food for nine families at Thanksgiving, and during the December holiday season

the students work for money to buy gifts for sixty children. The annual Fun Run at May Day Play Day collected $1500 this year to buy shoes for homeless children.

Service opportunities also extend beyond the local community. The godmother of an eighth grade student presented an assembly on ICAN, an organization that she founded to assist orphans in Romania. The Middle School responded by conducting a drive to gather diapers, Band-Aids, and diaper wipes that were sent with a volunteer group that was traveling to Romania during the summer. Several Middle School students and faculty members expressed a desire to participate in this service opportunity in the future. This year the School has provided almost 1,000 hours of volunteer service throughout the community with the help of more than forty parent volunteers. Numerous members of the Middle School faculty, as well as the parents of the students, are actively involved in service work in their churches and community, so the students learn by example that service is part of a fulfilled life.

One project that best exemplifies the spirit of the Middle School's service efforts is an ongoing connection that the seventh grade class established with a local nursing home after a fall Service Day visit to Hillcrest Manor, a private residential facility with twenty residents. Through a survey, 75% of the students expressed an interest in being involved on a yearlong basis with these residents. Teachers arranged visits during the school day, with groups of twelve students visiting twice each month. During the advisory sessions the seventh grade students made birthday cards, books, and other gifts to share. During the visits, the students participated in skits, readings, songs, dances, crafts, and conversations with the residents. A total of 25 parent volunteers were involved in this project this year. Our grade-level goal of respect for ourselves and others came to life in a vivid way. Many students and teachers plan to continue their volunteer work at Hillcrest during the summer because of the service partnership among the students, parents, and faculty team members.

The Montclair Kimberley Academy

Montclair, NJ

National Association of Independent Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2000
Special Emphasis Character Education Winner 2000
http://www.montclairkimberley.org

Summary

Located in Montclair, New Jersey, the Middle School of the Montclair Kimberley Academy is an independent school for approximately four hundred students in grades four through eight. As one of three divisions of the Montclair Kimberley Academy, the Middle School views itself as the keystone of a fine pre-k through twelfth grade independent school. Our mission is to build upon the foundation begun at the Primary School in order to prepare students academically, socially, and emotionally for a highly competitive college preparatory high school. Beyond that we seek to foster in our students an understanding of the principles of ethical citizenship that will enable them to lead good lives beyond our halls.

We believe that pre-and early adolescence is a time of life that presents unique opportunities as well as unique challenges for parents, teachers and, most of all, for the students themselves. Working in partnership with a supportive parent body, the faculty and administration of the school provide a program that provides the daily academic challenge that this bright, highly motivated student body demands. The MKA Core Works program insures exposure for every child in every grade to significant texts and significant art. These texts and art have been judged by the faculty to have met the tests of timelessness, centrality, influence, originality, and accessibility. To our knowledge it is the only program of its kind in any middle school in the nation. Challenging academics is only half the story at the Middle School at MKA. We understand well that in addition to academic challenge, care and warmth and nurture are necessary for children this age to learn and to grow. The Middle School at MKA is a child-centered institution where each decision made has the students as the prime beneficiaries.

Well versed in both the science and the art of teaching and firmly grounded in their disciplines, this faculty is able to deliver subject matter in a way that makes sense to a group of students of diverse abilities and learning styles. This expertise

results from the school's ability to attract and retain faculty members well prepared in their disciplines before they arrive at MKA and dedicated to taking maximum advantage of a well defined professional development program. What makes this faculty so strong, however, is its collective dedication to this age child. Serving not only as expert teachers of subject matter, they are also trusted and respected advisors and teachers of children. The advisory program provides all children with carefully selected members of the faculty whom they can know and trust and who know the children well. The advisor serves as the child's confidante and advocate throughout the year and is the first point of contact between home and school.

The philosophy of challenge for every child every day is evident not only in the classroom. A full range of extracurricular programs, including extensive club offerings, student government, and both intramural and interscholastic sports, is available for all students. All of these endeavors help to promote a spirit of community in two important ways. Through participation in them, students have the opportunity to meet others both within and outside their own grade level who share their interests. All of these programs also provide opportunities for children to accept positions of responsibility and to work together toward common goals. The no-cut policy for the interscholastic athletic program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders means that every child who goes out has a place on the team and plays in games. Many athletes trying a sport for the first time in the Middle School go on to distinction in that sport at the Upper School level.

We work hard to help our students understand their responsibility as citizens to act in the interest of the greater community. Thus service learning is an integral part of our school's philosophy. But programs like the Ruby Bridges' project, for which our partnership with St. Phillip's Academy in Newark serves as the national model, are as important as community service. In this program two schools, one drawing students primarily from the inner city and one drawing students primarily from the suburbs, meet as equals to share poetry and literature and to engage in meaningful discussion. In this way children of diverse backgrounds come to understand that their common ground is so much greater than the things that separate them.

This is truly a community of learners. Teachers work hard to stay current in their disciplines as well as in both the art and science of teaching through participation in workshops both on campus and off, as well as through graduate course work and self-designed study funded by the Parents Association. This enables the teachers to participate fully in discussions related to the improvement of curriculum and programs at the school. Department meetings, team meetings, full faculty meetings, and faculty retreats all provide faculty members with a forum to contribute to school improvement. A laptop computer pilot program in the sixth grade is the first in the nation to measure learning outcomes for students using laptops. The study, designed and carried out by the sixth grade team, will enable

MKA not just to participate in, but to help to frame the debate over, the use of powerful technology in middle schools.

Our goal is to be the finest independent middle school in the nation. Perhaps what most distinguishes the Middle School at MKA is that all of the school's constituencies understand that goal and also understand that reaching it requires commitment and effort. For administrators that means building a school culture willing to look at virtually any area of the program in order to find ways to become better at serving the academic, social, and emotional needs of pre-and early adolescent children. For faculty that means a commitment to challenging every child every day at his or her highest level. For parents it means joining the school in a partnership for educating their children. For students it means giving their best effort every day in every class and endeavoring to live their lives by a Code of Honor.

The Middle School at MKA is a school that is by any objective measure a fine institution of learning for nearly four hundred students in grades four through eight. We are proud of our accomplishments and look toward the coming century confident in our ability not only to continue to succeed, but to participate in the discussions that will contribute to the understanding and education of all middle school students nationwide.

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

The Middle School focuses on children; and the organization of the school, as well as the academic emphasis, reflects this focus.

The backbone of the school, the advisor system, "manages" the culture of the school. Advisor groups deal with behavior issues, ethical issues, and issues that pertain to "coming-of-age." In grade-level teams, advisors meet once a cycle to engage in conversations and find ways to present the students with a common viewpoint. We emphasize social consciousness and openly reward good citizenship and a strong work ethic. Students and faculty come together to collectively discuss current issues that are important to the life of the school.

This past year our student government has taken an even greater leadership role in the school. On a weekly basis, they meet to act on the needs of the student body. The student government now organizes service and recreational activities for the student body that were previously adult directed. Its president also conducts the weekly school assembly and helps to inspire school spirit and motivate peers.

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Our Common Purpose states that teachers at MKA must see themselves as life-long learners. Our students are wonderful catalysts for our own learning, and we willingly seek the insights that will help us better their lives. We engage in regular self-examination. The Middle States evaluation process and this Blue Ribbon application have also created opportunities for self-reflection. Our findings have led us to invite experts in relevant fields to better educate us about the lives of our students. For instance, after the AAUW report about girls in our schools, we learned ways to empower the girls at MKA. Last year, psychologist and author Michael Thompson spoke to parents and faculty about how better to serve the boys in our school, to enable them to live the productive and creative lives that contemporary American society demands of them. His information resulted in insights that enabled the faculty to act collectively against bullying and intimidation. Our collaboration with writer and civil rights activist, Ruby Bridges, has helped to foster a relationship with St. Phillip's Academy that has resulted in enhancing our students' understanding of race relations.

We believe that we can best serve our young students by remaining steadfast in our commitment to giving them the best we have ourselves learned, but remaining flexible enough to match their changing needs—expert mariners who know the educational "sea" well enough to be both wary of its hazards and open to its delights.

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

What other content areas or programs play essential roles in your schoolwide curriculum goals?

The seventh grade Shakespeare project, a highlight of an MKA student's years at the Middle School, is unique to our school in providing every seventh grader with an in-depth experience of a Shakespeare play with special emphasis on the language. As they study the play, students also stage a production of it. For five weeks, the schedule includes 90 minutes, three times a cycle, of production time. Students may choose to be a part of the acting cast or to join one of six production teams.

This project is important to the entire school. The eighth grade participates by studying the same play as the seventh grade, so that they bring to their viewing of the final production a very clear understanding. The drama teacher also describes the play—the main plot as well as the different factors involved in the production—to the students of grades four through six. This means that, for about eight weeks from December to February, the entire Middle School is preparing for a Shakespeare masterpiece, with every student invested in the production.

This depth of exposure to Shakespeare is unique. The faculty and administration have invested a great deal in this project because they understand the value of this exposure to great literature and drama. By the time our students graduate from the Middle School, they have been exposed to five different plays and feel comfortable with Elizabethan language and poetry.

As expert mariners, we know that our "ship" can sail well only if its crew carries the treasures of time and place—the gems of ancients and moderns, the gold of home and foreign lands. The MKA Core Works program is designed to bring stability and focus to students in the midst of changing times by ensuring that certain pieces of the existing English, history, and fine arts curricula will remain in place for at least five years. Incoming teachers and administrators, as well as new parents and students, can count on the curriculum including these three or four works at each grade level.

A committee of K-12 teachers and administrators chose the works. They gave special consideration to including literature by authors of diverse backgrounds, as well as to keeping in focus the European-American tradition. In addition, experts in the relevant fields have been employed to educate the faculty in the depth and scope of the works.

The list of Core Works includes:

Grade 8: *The Declaration of Independence* and Arthur Ailey's *Revelations*

Grade 7: An excerpt from *The Heights of Machu Picchu* by Pablo Neruda and Kaufman and Hart's *You Can't Take It With You*

Grade 6: Various stories from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle and a study of Chartres Cathedral

Grade 5: Hammurabi's Code of Law and a work by Georgia O'Keeffe

Grade 4: "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus and Verdi's *Aida*

Beth Tfiloh Community School

Baltimore, MD

Association of Independent Maryland Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
Special Emphasis Technology Award 2001
http://www.btfiloh.org

Summary Statement

For the past half century, Beth Tfiloh Community School has dedicated itself to creating a vibrant educational community that touches the minds and hearts of Jewish children in profound and lasting ways. Over the last ten years, Beth Tfiloh Community School has experienced monumental growth as an institution, with the implementation of innovative curricular and extra-curricular programs in parent education, professional development, technology, athletics, and the arts that have placed the school in the forefront of Jewish day school education. The school's administration and leadership are committed to meeting the needs of each individual student through continued innovation, both as an institution of learning and as a guarantor of Jewish survival, as it strives to meet the challenges facing the academic and Jewish community in the 21st century.

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

As set forth in the Beth Tfiloh mission statement, it is the goal of the school to develop in each child a love of learning. In actuality, the entire Beth Tfiloh family is encouraged to be life-long learners. We are particularly proud of our efforts in the area of professional development of faculty, staff and board of trustees, groups on which the school relies for the development and implementation of its long-term mission as well as its day-to-day objectives. Faculty and staff have endowed professional development opportunities, both in-house and off-site; including funded university study, professional workshops and

on-site seminars. Under *Mercaz: The Beth Tfiloh Dahan Center for Jewish Life and Learning* and other family-oriented educational programs, parents and others are invited to prepare and participate in Jewish holiday celebrations to create a greater sense of community, and to study Judaic topics that parallel the Judaic Studies curriculum of the School.

Our staff is actively engaged in collective inquiry, reflection and responsible decision making, resulting in continuous school improvement. The numerous administrative committees, which are either teacher-driven or teacher-chaired, include: the Professional Development Committee (identifies opportunities for teacher education), the Lower School Academic Council (created as a vehicle for improving communication between grades and between disciplines), the Upper School Academic Council (created to increase integration between general and Judaic studies), the AIMS Accreditation Study and Strategic Planning Committee, the Technology Task Force, and the Teacher Advocacy Committee.

In addition to our high academic standards, emphasis is placed on the love of G-d and love of humanity in an atmosphere that encourages social consciousness, community leadership, and a commitment to the highest standards of ethical behavior. These values are fully integrated into school-wide behavior and policies. The Lower School Parent Handbook and Professional Staff Handbook devote sections to *Derech Eretz* (Hebrew for respect, kindness and giving honor to others). The handbooks clearly articulate acceptable standards of behavior, which are explained in easily understood terms. The standards are taught in school, and parents are encouraged to reinforce the standards at home.

Students learn ethical behavior and moral values through the Judaics curriculum beginning in kindergarten and throughout their school years at Beth Tfiloh. First grade students learn the Hebrew alphabet by associating each letter with one or more Midot (Jewish values). Third grade students participate in a Midot Program, which provides a review of Jewish values in song and prose. Ethical values are derived from text study, which teaches positive attributes as modeled by Biblical personalities. All Lower School grades participate in one or more ongoing community service projects, including collecting money each week for charity, collecting food for area food banks and soup kitchens, reciting weekly psalms for those who are ill, entertaining elderly residents of nursing homes, and collecting toys to give to needy children for Chanukah. Middle School students also participate in grade-wide service projects benefiting a wide range of causes. An annual theme is used in each division to reinforce a particular value. Examples of Lower School themes that have been used in recent years include *Derech Eretz* (Hebrew for civility/respect), or "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself" and *B'zelem Elokim* (every person is created in G-d's image and deserves respect). In the Middle School, character development themes have drawn from contemporary movies and popular culture, and have included "M.I.B." (Midot/values awards placed In a

Box) and "X-Files" (recognition of exceptional behavior through acts of kindness to others). Our teachers are expected to model ethical behavior, and frequently provide children with "Caught in the Act" awards for exhibiting responsible and caring social interactions during the school day. At the end of each school year, our principal presents one student in each class with a Citizenship Award for his or her socially responsible attitude. Our Judaics teachers also present one student in each class with the *chesed*, or kindness, award, for the student who exhibits the characteristic of kindness the entire year.

Beth Tfiloh provides all of its members with support for life-long learning both academically and spiritually. We foster a culture devoted to providing opportunities for students, staff and parents to grow as individuals, reach our full potential and interact effectively with peers.

Leadership and Educational Vitality

As you reflect on the last five years, what conditions or changes have contributed most to the overall success of your school?

Over the past five years, the changes which have contributed most to the overall success of the school have been an outgrowth of the four areas of primary emphasis from the Strategic Plan developed through the AIMS/ Middle States self-study. These are the significant initiatives in (1) professional development, (2) technology, (3) curricular integration, and (4) increasing Hebrew Language fluency.

Beth Tfiloh is particularly proud of expanded, endowed professional development opportunities for faculty and staff at all divisions of the school, both in-house and off-site, including funded university study, professional workshops and on-site seminars. Likewise, the transformation of the school into a "laptop culture" through the design and development of a school-wide technology initiative, including staff training and curriculum development, has had a major impact on the school's overall success. A school-wide effort to enhance integration has been facilitated by the creation of Lower School and Upper School Academic Councils and the creation of Language Arts Coordinator, and Judaics Coordinator in the Lower School. The Hebrew Language and Judaics program has been significantly strengthened through the use of a professional educational consultant, and most recently the hiring of a new Lower School/Middle School Hebrew Language Coordinator who will provide teacher supervision as well an increase opportunities for integration of Hebrew Language with Judaic and General Studies

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subjects.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, the school has experienced tremendous growth in its athletics program, adult and family Jewish education programs and has this year hired a new Creative Arts Director to implement a new school-wide curriculum in the visual and performing arts.

How has the school integrated technology to improve management and program efficiency and effectiveness?

Beth Tfiloh Lower School and Middle School administrative and support staff have access to the school-wide computer network. All new and re-enrolling students are updated in a networked database with basic demographic and billing information. A specialized grading and scheduling program is used to provide automated schedules and report cards for students in grades 6 through 8.

Administrators and teachers communicate regularly and collaboratively using Microsoft Outlook as an e-mail client. Distribution lists are used to disseminate Good and Welfare Reports and other information to specific groups of administrators and teachers. Computer applications, including Microsoft Word, Excel and Access, are readily available to administrators and support staff. Individualized and small group computer training is provided through both an outside computer consultant and members of the Technology Team on an "as needed" basis.

Recent examples of how technology has facilitated the analysis of data for key decisions include a report of students sorted by postal carrier route for use by the Logistics Committee in planning bus routes and the generation of automated reports of students qualifying for "Honor Roll" in the Middle School. In addition, the Lower School has instituted a series of grade-specific report cards using Microsoft Word, which were highly customized to reflect the program goals of each grade. These have been easily modified from year to year as needed, and have provided significant efficiency and cost savings. Support staff has received training in merging form documents and data files for correspondence purposes.

A computer-based problem tracking and inventory system assists the Technology Team and is used to log computer problems, which are corrected by in-house computer technicians.

Special Emphasis Area: Technology

Beth Tfiloh Community School has adopted and implemented a school-wide Technology Plan. The plan was developed by an independent educational consultant in conjunction with key members of the school administration and presented to the Technology Task Force and Board of Trustees for approval.

The Technology Task Force is a committee comprised of administrators, members of the Technology Team (computer teachers, consultants, and technicians), teachers representing various grade levels, parents of students representing various grade levels, and members of the community. The Task Force meets several times a year to review the technology program and make recommendations. A Technology Steering Committee meets on a monthly basis to review ongoing issues in faculty training, curriculum integration, hardware, software and networking needs, and to review and update the technology budget.

The Technology Steering Committee also addresses issues relating to administrative and support staff computer needs, including training, hardware needs, and software selection.

The Technology Team functions on a daily basis to provide technical assistance and trouble shooting, and provide repairs and replacements to workstations, servers, and the network infrastructure and Internet provider.

Beth Tfiloh's vision for technology is to integrate the use of computers in the classroom as a tool for the enhancement of the curriculum and to prepare students for the challenges of colleges and the business and professional world. The program is premised on studies that have shown computers to significantly aid in the development of research skills, writing, and critical thinking, and to foster curricular integration through inter-disciplinary projects. Studies also document that the use of laptops in an "anywhere, anytime learning" program increases overall motivation and interest in school, and provides enhanced learning opportunities for both gifted and special-needs students alike.

While the technology program for all grades stresses the use of instructional integration, the Student Laptop Program, which is being phased in for grades 3 through 8, provides the best model for true curricular integration since the laptop computer is constantly available as a valuable educational tool for each student in the participating grades. Now in its second year, the Student Laptop Program has been enhanced through the addition of a wireless network and large-screen monitors located in each "laptop classroom." Lower and Middle School students regularly use their laptops as an integral part of their curriculum in language arts, social studies, math, science, and Hebrew Language and Judaic Studies. Students write prose and poetry using Microsoft Word, e-mail assignments to teachers and peers, engage in peer editing, and re-send attached documents via e-mail. Final documents are printed at home or in class. Desktop folders are used to organize

documents by subject, and classroom policies are adopted to ensure that computers are used efficiently and only for acceptable uses. In Social Studies, students integrate graphics and the results of research, both through the library and over the Internet, in preparing electronic booklets using Microsoft Word, Internet Explore, and PowerPoint. Advanced math students use Excel to organize and present data, including graphing and charts. Judaic subjects also benefit from the wealth of Jewish resources available through the Internet, and from Word and Powerpoint, used in conjunction with Hebrew word processing (Davkawriter) and Judaic on-line texts (The Complete Tanach).

The growth of the Beth Tfiloh Technology Program began with a comprehensive and intensive professional development program in September 1998 through an independent technology educational consultant. All teachers were given an initial technology self-assessment and a year-long program of sequential training provided teachers with core application skills sets, classroom management tools, and curriculum integration and lesson plans. The training continued throughout the 1999-2000 school year, with continuing assessments tracking each individual teacher's progress. For the 2000-2001 school year, additional staff resources have been obtained to continue this professional development on a full-time basis, with continued oversight and input by the technology consultant. These include a new full-time Director of Technology, a Lower School/Middle School Technology Coordinator, a Computer Resource Teacher, and a Judaics Technology Coordinator. A major part of the job description of these new faculty positions will be to continue and strengthen the professional development component of the technology program.

Beth Tfiloh has assembled a Technology Team to provide ongoing technical assistance and support for teachers, students, administrators, and support staff. The school's Network Administrator consists of an outsourced computer consultant, who provides technical support for the school-wide network and over 300 workstations and laptop computers with a flexible staff of one to four technicians, depending upon the workload. While the Network Administrator has primary responsibility for technical support, this effort is also supported by a team consisting of a full-time Director of Technology, a Lower School/Middle School Technology Coordinator, a Computer Resource Teacher, and a Judaics Technology Coordinator. These in-house members of the Technology Team provide valuable assistance through software application assistance and troubleshooting of basic hardware problems, and are in regular communication with the Network Administrator.

A special computer support office, called the CAVE, serves as a checkpoint for teachers and students with laptop computer problems. A pool of loaner laptop computers is available to give to students and teachers if they need to leave their laptop for repairs. The CAVE provides on-site warranty service and repairs on all

Acer computers. The CAVE houses the school's network server and includes wired and wireless hubs for testing and troubleshooting.

A database of computer problems is maintained on the Beth Tfiloh network, with secretaries in specified offices having responsibility for logging requests for assistance. This system ensures an orderly tracking of technical assistance requests and allows for oversight by the Director of Technology. In addition, all personnel employed by the Network Administrator are within regular communication via walkie talkie, mobile telephone, pagers, and wireless e-mail.

All teacher and student laptops include modems configured for dial-up access to the Internet. Students and teachers are given the capability to obtain their school e-mail from home, through an Outlook dial-up account or by using Web-based e-mail. Using distribution lists, teachers are encouraged to e-mail assignments and notices to students in their classes.

The Beth Tfiloh Web site provides a growing portal of on-line resources for the school community. The site includes a wide range of information, from school closing announcements, to press releases of student accomplishments, to multimedia pages of school plays and sporting events. A new school Intranet was launched this year, with individual teacher Web pages and departmental resources. An enthusiastic group of teachers has begun posting class information on their Web sites, including syllabi, class notes, classroom policies, links to resources and grades (listed anonymously by student codes).

The Beth Tfiloh listserv provides an electronic mailing list by subscription to members of the community. Information about upcoming school and Beth Tfiloh synagogue events is disseminated to a list of over 600 subscribers. Weekly sermons given by Beth Tfiloh Rabbis on a wide variety of Jewish topics are widely distributed via this listserv, with new subscribers added each week.

The Churchill School

St. Louis, MO

National Association of Independent Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1990 and 2001
www.churchillschool.org

Student Focus and Support

How would you describe the student population? What are your students' needs? How do you ensure that the needs of all students are met?

The Churchill School serves high-potential children between the ages of eight and sixteen with diagnosed specific learning disabilities. The educational program is individualized according to each child's unique academic strengths and challenges. A psycho-educational evaluation is required as part of the admissions process. Prior to the start of school, a pretesting battery is administered to each student and individual student staffings are held. Each student's areas of strengths and concerns are discussed and an individual program focus is established. The individual tutorial, a daily 50-minute class, focuses on the child's major areas of difficulty. Tutorial teachers serve as the Case Managers for their students, making sure that each child's academic program is geared to the individual needs of that child. All curriculum classes are conducted in small groups with a teacher-student ratio that is approximately 1:8. In order to provide the necessary personalized instruction, the overall school teacher-student ratio is 1:3. Supervisors work closely with teachers, ensuring that appropriate goals are developed and effective remediation is implemented. Daily 20-minute staff meetings are held to discuss student accomplishments as well as students who are experiencing difficulty. Whenever necessary, individual student meetings are held to focus on immediate student needs.

What nonacademic services and programs are available to support students, and how do they relate to the student needs and school goals identified?

The following nonacademic services and programs are available to enhance the Churchill program and to ensure that students' needs are being met:

Counseling/Drop Out Prevention. The learning disabled population as a whole is "at risk" in terms of the possibility of school failure, dropping out of school, and the development of emotional and/or substance abuse problems. Students who attend Churchill have been identified as learning disabled and are "at risk". The thrust of Churchill's program for each student is to develop the self-esteem and academic skills necessary to persevere and thrive in academic and daily life. Success makes it unnecessary for our students to "drop out" physically, mentally, or emotionally. Churchill has employed a part-time consulting psychologist who is available for consultation to staff, families and students at no additional cost. Students and families in need of on-going help are referred to appropriate resources. Approximately 13% of our student population were involved in individual or family counseling during the 1999/2000 school term.

Language Therapy. Since the language needs of the majority of our students can be appropriately addressed through the daily 1:1 Tutorial, the school does not have a language therapist on staff. Language therapy services are available on an individual contract basis for students in need of intensive language therapy. Licensed therapists provide services. Frequent communication between the child's Case Manager and the therapist ensures coordination of instruction. Approximately 14% of our current student population are receiving language services.

Eighth Hour Program. The Eighth Hour program, an extension of the school day, is provided, at no additional cost, to students who are experiencing difficulty with homework completion. The intent of Eighth Hour is to make homework completion a successful experience, building the independent work skills necessary for students to complete their homework at home. The program is individualized with specific goals developed to help each student acquire independent work skills. Students may be assigned to Eighth Hour on a daily basis or may utilize the program on a schedule deemed appropriate by the Tutorial teacher. 20% of our student body participated in 8th Hour at some time during the 1999/2000 school term.

Check In/Check Out. The Check In/Check Out Program, monitored by Tutorial staff, is provided for students who need extra help with homework organizational skills. Upon the recommendation of the Tutorial teacher, students

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come to Check In before school to show completed homework and organized notebooks. Some students repeat this process at the end of the school day, showing completed assignment books and homework that has been assigned. Students can begin Check In/Check Out at any point in the school year. Students "graduate" from Check In/Check Out as they demonstrate the necessary organizational skills on a consistent basis. Approximately 35% of our student body access this program.

Homework Honors and Citizenship Honors. Students who complete all homework and exhibit appropriate citizenship for the week are recognized at a weekly small group assembly. Names of students who meet either or both of these criteria are listed on "Homework Honors" and "Citizenship Honors". Students may earn up to two credits each week by being on one or both of these lists. Opportunities to cash in earned credits occur at least monthly. Approximately 90% of our student body make at least one of the lists each week.

Reading Incentive Program. The Reading Incentive Program encourages students and faculty to set monthly reading goals to receive a reward for each month. Points are also earned based on the number of minutes read per month. All participants are recognized at the monthly all-school assembly. Point certificates are awarded and can be redeemed for prizes at the Reading Incentive store. Top readers, determined by the number of minutes read, are recognized with trophies at our annual Graduation/Awards Ceremony. Last year 90% of our student body participated in this program.

Drug Abuse Prevention. The DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program is taught for 16 weeks to students in the fifth grade. The program is sponsored and administered by the local police department.

Health Services. All health services provided by the school are mandated and regulated by the Missouri Department of Mental Health. The Churchill School is licensed by this department and all medications and health services meet the standards set up by the department. In addition, nine members of the faculty are trained in CPR yearly, and several staff members are given first-aid training every three years. Churchill conducts monthly fire drills and severe weather drills in accordance with the city of Ladue and St. Louis guidelines.

Affinity Clubs. This year a new program called Affinity Clubs was instituted. Students have the opportunity to join clubs that coincide with their interests and affinities. These clubs take place during recess time each day as an alternative to going outside. Clubs such as Spanish, Computer Art and Playground Pals are offered with approximately 50% of the student body participating.

Afternoon Adventures Program. The Afternoon Adventures Program provides enrichment activities and social interactions for students in grades 2-6 (Lower School). Approximately 55% of the students participate in this program.

Eighth Hour, Check In/Check Out, Homework Honors and Citizenship Honors, Reading Incentive, Drug Abuse Prevention, Health Services, Affinity

Clubs, and After School Adventures Program are all offered at no additional cost.

For special education schools, how do you assist in planning access to further services after students leave the school?

Since our students leave Churchill at different gradelevels, a variety of support services are available. Faculty members visit other schools to determine the type of student that would be successful in that environment. A workshop for parents is held each fall to disseminate information about other schools. Tutorial teachers and supervisors are available to provide academic information, to assist with appropriate class placement and scheduling, and to develop an IEP. Former students may access after-school tutoring services at Churchill. Teachers at receiving schools are welcome to observe our classes, methods, and techniques, and/or to meet with faculty. Written reports are sent to receiving schools at parental request.

Former students often request assistance to obtain untimed college admission testing or to access college programs for the learning disabled.

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Grace Lutheran School

Pocatello, ID

Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.gracepocatello.org/gls/index.htm

Student Focus and Support

What cocurricular activities are available for students and how do those activities extend the academic curriculum?

Cocurricular activities are available for all GLS students and extend the academic curriculum by expanding students' abilities to communicate effectively, work cooperatively, behave responsibly, and develop their minds while strengthening their bodies. Teachers at each grade level design and integrate cocurricular events and activities as a part of their curriculum, providing students with the opportunity to be active learners.

GLS students have many opportunities to participate in the performing arts. Choir is offered to students in fourth through eighth grades. The GLS Junior High Choir is frequently chosen for special performances throughout the community. Students at all grade levels sing during chapel services and other school events. Thirteen percent of fifth through eighth grade students participate in either beginning or intermediate band. In preparation for formal band instruction, third graders are given instruction in playing the recorder. Student-led chapel services feature dramatic productions. Seasonal performances feature kindergarten and first grades at Thanksgiving, second and third grades at Christmas, fourth through sixth grades in early spring and seventh and eighth grades in late spring. Eighty-four percent of all GLS students participate in band, choir, recorder, handbells, and/or the annual school-wide musical production in cooperation with the Missoula Children's Theater.

During the annual GLS Fine Arts Festival, the artistic talents of all students are displayed together in the school gymnasium; every inch of available space - walls, room dividers, and bleachers - is covered with student artwork. GLS

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students and families enjoy seeing how students mature through the years. Everyone seems to share the art teacher's conviction that "Each piece of student artwork is valuable and worthy of framing!" Plans are being made for the 2000-2001 festival to include choral and band concerts.

Also, during the Celebration of the Visual and Performing Arts and Sciences each year, students have the opportunity to share their individual accomplishments in the areas of art, music, drama, or science with other GLS students and families.

All GLS students in grades three through eight have the opportunity to participate in sporting events and athletic competition, including basketball, volleyball, soccer, downhill skiing, track, and cheerleading. Sixty-one percent of the seventh and eighth grade girls are on the girls' basketball team. Forty-four percent of the seventh and eighth grade boys are members of the boys' basketball team. On Soccer Friday, third through sixth graders spend a day in Twin Falls, Idaho, playing soccer games against teams from other Lutheran schools around the region. Each Friday in February, fourth through eighth graders travel to nearby Pebble Creek Ski Area for Ski School and an afternoon of downhill skiing and snowboarding. During the 1999-2000 school year, 91% of all eligible students participated in the skiing program; this year, the activity will be expanded to include third graders as well. Each spring, GLS hosts two invitational track meets for Lutheran schools giving students in grades three through eight the opportunity to compete with students from other Lutheran schools in Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah.

At least 80% of GLS teachers are involved in organizing and coordinating cocurricular activities and events. An open, caring environment and a close relationship between teachers and their students helps teachers be aware of their students' needs and interests. Based on teacher input, the Leadership Team recommends to the School Board which cocurricular activities should be approved and funded. For example, a continuing interest in team sports and significant increases in student population between grades highlighted the need for funding additional basketball and volleyball teams in 2000-2001.

The majority of cocurricular activities at GLS are designed for 100% student participation. Parallel and complementary activities help nonparticipating students feel included and enjoy opportunities for social and physical development. Last year, primary students who were too young for downhill skiing enjoyed a series of roller-skating lessons. Kindergarten graduates have a cap and gown graduation ceremony just like graduating eighth graders. During Spirit Days, students who do not participate in the Christ Classic Tournament are treated to a week of activities to celebrate school spirit with fun dress-up themes for each school day.

One goal at GLS is to ensure that no student is denied participation in any school activity or event because of financial hardship. Students, parents, and teachers organize and support fundraising events to offset the cost of cocurricular

activities. For example, Fun Food Fridays is a weekly fourth grade activity to raise money for the annual class trip to Boise, Idaho. The Christian environment of giving and loving is reflected by the generous donations throughout the school year by GLS parents, members of the Grace Lutheran Church, and other individuals within the community. Last year, members of the Grace Lutheran Church congregation donated frequent-flyer miles so that all seventh and eighth grade students who wanted to participate in the Christian Discovery Tour of Washington, D.C. were able to do so.

Holy Family School

New Albany, IN

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

School culture is Christ-centered and is woven into parish life. The parish pastor, religious education staff, parishioners, school families and school personnel share in a vision and mission of a Catholic community of faith formation and excellence in education for Holy Family School. With the strong support of the parish community, Holy Family administration, faculty and parents work together to engender in students a philosophy and work ethic of life-long learning, achievement and Christian values and personal responsibility. Most of our parents are college educated and have similar aspirations for their children. There is strong parental involvement in school and extracurricular activities, communication with teachers, and participation in school decision-making through committees and improvement plans, school commission and parent organization, parent/teacher conferencing, and parent surveys. (In an August, 2000 Parent Satisfaction Survey, 75%—210/280—of families responded.) A high standard of achievement is an expectation of parents, and they enthusiastically participate in school programs and activities.

Faculty and school administrators have a strong desire to instill confidence, character, and strong academic background in all of our students, and to challenge each to her or his potential.

Through a series of improvement plans over the last five years, faculty members have individually and collectively worked to establish high personal and academic standards in their classrooms.

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What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does your school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

Holy Family practices the philosophy that "Children don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (Anon). From the first days of kindergarten through eighth grade, teachers work with students and their parents to instill values of love and caring for each other, which are reinforced in our school liturgies, classroom activities, and school programs. Our *school families* program promotes healthy social and team relationships with multi-age groups. Our junior high advisory program works to develop positive peer relations and connections with teachers. Outside speakers and community role models such as Robbie Valentine, a local college basketball star, speak to our students about relationships and high achievement in school. The principal, assistant principal and teachers facilitate discussions with students about positive peer relationships and address common problems, such as putdowns, sexual harassment, and acceptance of differences. Students build relationships with adults and senior citizens through weekly school liturgies, Grandparents' Day, Catholic School Week, Junior High Parent Breakfast, Special Persons Day, and Donuts with Dads.

Each year, we begin the school term with a unifying theme (*Go the Distance*, 1997-98; *We Are Family*, 1998-99; *Together We Can... with Hearts, Minds and Hands*, 1999-2000; *We Are Called*, 2000-2001). This theme gives us specific moral and values messages that we integrate into the school activities each year. Our students are divided into *school families*, who meet regularly throughout the year to promote school pride and unity, Christian values, and mutual caring. Each *family* is made up of approximately 20 students, at least two from each grade level (K-8) and a teacher sponsor. The 7th and 8th grade family leaders coordinate and organize their *family* for special events during the year. Examples include *Family* Lunch Day, *Family* Mass Day, Field Day, and Lenten Special Activity. Older students build further relationships with younger students by acting as reading partners with primary level students.

Holy Family School culture presents a balance of educational, spiritual, social, athletic/physical, and artistic endeavor. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in activities that develop the whole person. Teamwork, leadership, and responsibility are woven together with high achievement and reaching one's personal potential.

Middle school conferences led by students with faculty advisor and parents twice each year foster communication and responsibility for students to assume

ownership of their academic progress.

Faculty Teams, particularly Faith Formation and Special Events teams, provide structure and planning for Family events, all-school assemblies, award ceremonies, and liturgies.

Students get to know and develop relationships with nearly every teacher in the building over the course of their Holy Family experience. Our classroom structure employs looping a two-year program of studies with a core group of teachers for grades 3-4, 5-6, 7-8. Teachers concentrate on one core subject (Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies) with the homeroom teacher also working with students in the areas of religion, reading, and spelling.

Students at upper grade levels who transfer into Holy Family sometimes feel the pressures of making friends quickly. Currently, a new seventh grade boy who has been in seven different schools is struggling to make friends. We have had several discussions with his family and are working with both individual students and groups of seventh and eighth graders to provide a welcoming, nurturing environment where he can make friends and establish positive peer relationships.

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

How does your curriculum serve the broad goals for student learning and development that the public generally expects education to achieve; personal and intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for work and higher education?

Holy Family teachers emphasize the development of a strong, balanced curriculum, and teachers meet regularly in subject area teams (math, science, social studies, and language arts) as well as grade level teams (K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8) to analyze state and archdiocesan curriculum guides and to develop instructional activities which allow students to develop to their fullest potential in each of these disciplines. A strong emphasis is placed on skills at developmentally appropriate grade levels, particularly reading, language usage and basic math skills, which form the foundation for later higher level performance. The teachers recently studied and adopted alternative programs such as Saxon Math (1997-98) for grades K-6 and the Shurley Language Method (1998-99) for grades K-6. These programs have made a dramatic impact on the curriculum and instructional activities in these subject areas. Specifically, students in language classes analyze sentence parts beginning in first grade and use choral jingles to reinforce concepts. In math, continuous review of a variety of skills and concepts keep students sharp.

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Grades 3-6 use a "problem of the day" to supplement the Saxon Math with higher order thinking skills as well as use math enrichments beyond the textbook several times each month. A popular math project in grade 4 is to design a bedroom while staying within a budget. Teachers, parents, and students report positive effects of these programs.

In all core subject areas, special areas, and religious education, teachers incorporate proficiencies in the planning of their instruction. Course syllabuses, proficiency checklists, pretests, post-tests and instructional timelines are utilized to plan, implement and monitor educational objectives for each of these subject areas. Technology is incorporated in all subjects with the use of the computer lab, writing labs and computers in individual classrooms.

Holy Family administrators and teachers work extensively to blend Catholic school values and instruction, civic responsibility, an understanding of the basic principles of American government, and valuable life skills into the Holy Family school experience. Basic to our mission is the development of graduates who can contribute to self, family, church and community. Students at Holy Family participate in many activities which promote strong citizenship and service, such as voting during election periods (grades 5-8), study of the US Constitution (5-8), Indiana history (3-4), current events and local history elective (7-8), and school programs such as our Veteran's Day celebration. In 1999-2000, over 65 Veterans from our parish and school community met with students for a moving PowerPoint® musical presentation and reception developed and coordinated by our 6-8 graders. Holy Family School student and faculty representatives participate in Memorial Day services in downtown New Albany.

Community service and stewardship of the earth's resources are common themes at Holy Family. Economically, we have many advantages, and we work continually to teach students the value of serving others and giving back to the community. Each of 18 homerooms (K-8) participates in activities that reflect our appreciation for the gifts we have and our desire to share with the less fortunate or those in need. Over the past five years, Holy Family students have raised over $25,000 for the American Heart Association and over $13,000 for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital through all-school service projects. In addition, students regularly perform community service through preparing Easter baskets for orphans, sending money and care baskets to St. Elizabeth's Home, a local shelter for expectant mothers, making donations to Holy Childhood Association through our Lenten Rice Bowl program, providing clothing, books, glasses, and money for three parishes and clinics in the Honduras through a parish mission program, and providing food and serving meals at a local community center. Each year Holy Family Band students visit and perform for nursing home residents and at Silver Crest, a local center for children with multiple handicaps. In 1999-2000, 7th and 8th graders worked at a local Baby Fair called First Steps with the city of

New Albany and a local Christian church. The McDonald's House, local pet shelters, and St. Vincent dePaul Society food pantry, have all been recipients of the giving by our children and their families. Holy Family students participate in Earth-Day activities and perform conservation activities and recycling of white paper and cardboard throughout the school year. Our 6th-8th graders also learn to assist younger students by reading and helping in primary classrooms.

Students in the middle school advisor-advisee program work to develop interpersonal skills, do role-playing activities, and practice conflict management through MAPS, an advisory program provided by the State of Indiana. The students participate in CORE 40, a state program to develop career goals and plot an academic course of study to meet those goals. Students invite professional guests to participate in our speakers' bureau. In social studies and religion classes, students discuss workplace values and skills through interaction with these guests.

Holy Spirit Episcopal School

Houston, TX

National Association of Episcopal Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.hses.org

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Successful schools offer all students opportunities to be engaged with significant content. How does your school ensure that students achieve at high levels in the core subjects?

English (Language Arts)
Holy Spirit Episcopal School's language arts program is the cornerstone of the students' understanding of knowledge. The program helps students acquire the necessary skills needed for problem solving, decision making, and evaluation. A balance of traditional and experiential teaching methods enables students to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Reading instruction begins with readiness skills at the early childhood level. The lower school program builds on a foundation of phonics, balanced with literature, sight word instruction, and language. A variety of ways to express reactions to stories and events through class writing projects are provided. Basal reading instruction is supplemented by various activities that revolve around children's literature, magazines, and newspapers. Reading selections are chosen to correlate with current units of study, usually from science or social studies. As independent readers, middle school students explore and evaluate current novels through literature circles, role-playing, reenactments, or presentations. For example, eighth grade students study the historical events in each century of American history while exploring the humanities such as literature, art, and music. "Ode to the Poets" is an in-depth study combining the poetry of each century and how it relates to the music and art of the same period. The students research the poets and their works and then present the poetry through theatrical presentations during the year, with a final technology project at the end of the year. The theatrical

presentations include costumes, music appropriate for the time period, and props created in the styles of the aforementioned artists.

Writing to communicate effectively is stressed in all disciplines. Students write daily for a variety of purposes, modes, and audiences. Research skills are taught in all grade levels within the context of daily classroom activities, as well as long term projects and multimedia presentations. Spelling and grammar instruction are integrated into the writing process. Spelling is taught through core lists supplemented with words from various content areas. After instruction and practice, students are expected to apply the newly learned skills in their writings.

The assessment of Holy Spirit's language arts program takes place on a regular basis through formal evaluations carried out by the classroom teacher, curriculum coordinator, and division directors. An informal review is completed yearly within the grade levels. The faculty considers suggestions from the school community as well as from the latest research to update and improve the curriculum in order to meet the students' needs and learning styles. Student portfolios are maintained to monitor growth and development. The faculty has recently written benchmarks for each grade level in language arts according to national and Texas standards.

The language arts program offers an assessment approach that is balanced and comprehensive using growth portfolios and traditional assessment methods. In the past, the teachers focused entirely on actual percentage grades to report a student's progress. The teachers continue to evaluate with percentage grades as the school educates the faculty and parent body about new methods of assessment. The need for new assessment strategies became evident after a review of presently used techniques to determine students' comprehension of material.

Mathematics

The Holy Spirit Episcopal School mathematics program encourages the development of an understanding of mathematical concepts and their applications to daily life using both concrete and abstract reasoning skills. Students are given the opportunity to discover the theory and logic behind mathematical principles. The program builds number sense through a heavy integration of modeling and manipulatives to give students a firm conceptual base for real-life situations. Problem solving ability is extended through the use of cooperative learning and open-ended problems.

Beginning at the early childhood level students use manipulatives to discover mathematical facts, concepts, and procedures. The lower school program uses manipulatives to teach abstract processes in a concrete manner, and drill and practice are used for reinforcement. Presently, students in kindergarten through grade three are using the *Everyday Mathematics* program. This program parallels the national goals for mathematics education, which is shifting from computation

to problem solving and stresses an environment that encourages learning. Math instruction includes pattern and function, measurement, probability and statistics, logical thinking and problem solving, communication, geometry, and numeration. Holy Spirit will add this program to fourth grade in the fall of 2001.

In an upward spiraling effect, middle school math incorporates abstract mathematical problem solving. By integrating math with social studies, fifth grade students learn to choose a career, research to find a starting salary, and develop a budget for everyday life. The students determine how much they can spend on a mortgage payment, car payment, food, and clothing. Using technology and visuals, the students present their findings to their classmates. Furthermore, the importance that mathematics plays in a variety of careers is integrated into the curriculum.

The use of technology in the classroom is increasing, as students become proficient solvers of mathematical problems. Middle school math consists of general math classes in sixth and seventh grade, and algebra in the eighth grade class. Fifth and sixth grade math changed dramatically with the addition of math texts this year, which stress real-life applications of math.

The mathematics program uses both formal and informal assessment. Quizzes and games are used to evaluate mastery of basic facts. In the primary grades, pre-tests are used to determine individualized instruction and unit tests are used to evaluate computation and problem solving techniques. Quizzes and daily work are also included. Self-graded student assessment is used to evaluate homework and some class work. Informal assessments are used for classroom and small group participation. After researching current studies, the faculty is in the process of implementing a range of additional assessments, including portfolios and student-chaired conferences, to be used along with the current methods.

The Stanford Achievement Test scores were helpful in evaluating the areas that needed improvement. In order to bring concepts and application scores in line with the computation scores, Holy Spirit is in the process of implementing the *Everyday Mathematics* program, which is strong in concepts of numbers. By combining *Everyday Mathematics* with our current program, which is strong in computation and application, the teachers hope to create a challenging and balanced math program.

Science

The school's science program develops student understanding of concepts through experiential investigation, creative problem solving, decision-making, and the application of knowledge. The program incorporates classroom instruction, observation, discussion, hands-on laboratory and field activities, and technology to enable students to learn science disciplines and to investigate their environment.

The science curriculum has been reviewed and revised over the past four

years. The faculty evaluated the curriculum through small group discussion. The teachers developed the current curriculum which is consistent with the *National Science Education Standards* and the *McREL Content and Knowledge Standards and Benchmarks.*

At the kindergarten and elementary levels, science begins with the development of a question, either teacher or student generated. Students work cooperatively, learning to infer and predict outcomes through hands-on investigations. Grades one through four frequently use Carolina Biological units to teach age-appropriate concepts and skills through a "Focus-Explore-Reflect-Apply" learning cycle. Students relate these science activities and technological advances to daily life by discussing, questioning, and interpreting data in oral and written forms. Units of study include activities that use science process skills, on-line encyclopedia and Internet research, CDs, books, periodicals, field trips, guest speakers, and investigation of topics or themes. Student evaluation occurs through observations made during group and individual activities and by assembling samples of student work.

The first grade class studies the life cycle of the butterfly by investigating and observing their own painted lady butterflies' growth from egg to adult. Data is organized, recorded, and displayed daily. The unit culminates with a field trip to the Cockerell Butterfly Center at the Museum of Natural Science. The students' butterflies are then released on campus in our own butterfly garden.

Middle school science encompasses life, earth, and physical science while continuing the questioning process. To formulate answers, the students work cooperatively to employ the scientific method where they hypothesize and predict outcomes of experiments in laboratory and field experience settings. They assess everyday consumer, technological, and environmental issues.

The science program uses both formal and informal assessment procedures in seeking to evaluate its students' knowledge. The evaluation of the students' knowledge and skills that transcend subject content and are applicable throughout life are also valid. Finally, the students' performance, when tested against an established reliable specific objective, helps determine the quality and quantity of the students' ability to apply knowledge and skills to new and fresh situations.

The recent addition of the Automated Weather System enhances the school's science and technology curricula. The students collect data via the Internet on local and worldwide wind speed and direction, temperatures, rainfall, humidity, and barometric pressure. The students then analyze the data through graphs and charts in relation to the weather during that particular time span.

In January, students in grades three through eight participate in a science fair. Third grade students present an "Invention Convention." Each student invents an original machine combining two or more of the simple machines to create a working model that solves a problem task in the home. Fourth through

eighth grade students develop a question and hypothesize the answer. Students design a procedure, using the scientific method to test their hypothesis. The data is collected, a conclusion made, the hypothesis reevaluated, and the project is displayed. Judges evaluate projects and provide positive feedback.

Social Studies

The school believes that social studies teaches students how to be global citizens by providing the understanding of various issues found within our borders and beyond. The multidisciplinary educational approach incorporates newly learned information and core beliefs developed through socialization. The program lays a foundation for the students' evolving roles as members of society. Each year, building blocks provide the students with a continuous experience beginning with how to be a good citizen and culminating with the ability to apply critical thinking to issues that society faces.

In lower school the program emphasizes the social development and interaction within students' families, classrooms, school, and community. Students are taught to work and to play cooperatively while learning their roles in their families, school, and community. Students are encouraged to mediate their differences while learning the rights and values of responsible citizenship. The social studies program at the fourth grade level moves from learning about one's immediate surroundings to geography and history. Students study the geography and history of Texas by reading current literature about the state. Students participate in on-line research projects and make presentations using Hyper-Studio to the class and their parents. As the culminating unit, the fourth grade students visit the Texas Institute of Cultures and the Alamo.

Lower school assessment tools currently used are products and reports, observations and Stanford Achievement Test for grades one through four. These tools combined with growth portfolios and student-centered classrooms give the student, parent, and teacher the necessary assessment tools for effectively evaluating a student's learning progress.

The fifth grade students study the United States and its history. Students read novels about early America, engaging in literature study projects set in America and written by American authors. Returning to a simpler time in history, fifth grade students celebrate with a Victorian Christmas Party. Between parlor games and a feast of holiday treats, the students create handmade ornaments for the tree and donate the festive tree, baskets of edible treats, and a cash donation to a local family in need.

The sixth grade students are engaged in a study of ancient history that correlates language arts and history. Seventh grade students study world geography, a course that introduces the student to geography and its impact on the social, economic, and cultural development of the world. Working with the themes of

immigration and innovations, students research areas of interest, complete research papers, and present the projects using Power Point software.

Eighth grade students study pre-Columbian through modern day American history, which includes a study of the Constitution. The students make extensive use of the Media Center's on-line capabilities to complete various research projects. Films are incorporated as a catalyst for discussion of social struggle, politics, and economic influences on history.

The middle school uses assessments that include growth portfolios, student "chaired" conferences, and student-centered classrooms to complement the established assessments of reports, standardized tests, projects, and quizzes.

The Arts

Holy Spirit Episcopal School believes that fine arts communicate to children in a language that expresses concepts, reveals symbols, and forges connections to the community. In doing so, the arts cultivate interdisciplinary learning, historical and cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills. These educational strands instill in each child a respect for fine arts traditions and a life-long appreciation for the visual and performing arts.

The music and theater arts program at Holy Spirit Episcopal School engages students from early childhood through middle school and utilizes individual and group activities. The music and theater program provides child-centered, age-appropriate opportunities for students to explore, participate, and reflect on all types and periods of music and theater.

Beginning with kindergarten, each grade level presents an annual musical/dramatic production requiring total class participation and rehearsals for six weeks. Our new state-of-the-art sound system and multi-purpose stage augment the students' performances and provide a more professional atmosphere for the performers and audiences alike. Regular music instruction, weekly chapel services, Book Talks in our Learning Resource Center, and special events, such as Grandparents' and Special Friends Day, Fine Arts Festival, and Book Fair, present additional occasions for student performance.

The early childhood through kindergarten students learn musical concepts through rhythm, creative movement, and listening exercises. The children participate in simple rhythm activities and coordinate classroom units with appropriate songs and musical games. The students perform in the fall at Book Fair, entertain at a Patriotic Program, and the kindergarten classes reenact the Christmas story in December.

In lower school, students in grades one through four further their musical education through units of musical literature, which cover and extend beyond the regular academic classroom units of study. The students engage in songs and choral readings and interpret music and speech using movement and performance

techniques. The students also identify and practice the basic elements of music theory. The lower school students perform at the Book Fair, produce a grade level musical, and share the musical with the community through nursing home visits and performances at local malls.

The middle school music for grades five through eight consists of one quarter of music instruction. Each curriculum presents musical literature that corresponds with the classroom studies, i.e., fifth grade students study American history so they are exposed to American music. The middle school students participate in a spring musical that showcases talent and performance.

The art program emphasizes art production, criticism, and history, teaches aesthetics, and develops the critical skills necessary for art appreciation. Children in kindergarten through middle school are provided with opportunities to explore the elements of design while creating original artwork with a variety of media and tools. They also employ critical thinking skills by critiquing works of their peers and of well-known artists from various historical periods. The students learn to make informed judgements concerning the aesthetic value of these artworks and to appreciate their historical and cultural heritage. Each lesson focuses on a particular aspect of art theory, shows its application, and then provides an opportunity for each child to create an original artwork related to the lesson objective. Student work is exhibited on a regular basis throughout the school, providing opportunities for peer review as well as aesthetic enjoyment for the entire school community.

The basic elements and principles of art are introduced in kindergarten through second grade. Children are encouraged to incorporate them in original compositions as well as to recognize and describe them in the works of others. This descriptive process is the first step in the method of art criticism. Once children learn to look critically at art, they can then proceed to analyze, interpret, and evaluate it. These steps are progressively developed and integrated with art history in the upper grades to demonstrate the true significance of art in culture, both past and present.

More specialized art topics are introduced in grades three and four. Third grade students explore the evolution of architecture from ancient to modern civilizations, learning about basic architecture as well as the cultural influences that affected it. Students create models of ancient architecture and plan their dream house and community. Fourth grade concentrates on sculpture. Students review works from various civilizations, including primitive, classical, and modern examples; explore different media and tools; and create personal sculptures.

The middle school program concentrates on specific artists and historical periods. Fifth grade students discover a new aspect of American history by studying a variety of great American painters from pre-colonial times to the twentieth century. Sixth grade students explore great art of the world, from prehistoric to traditional, and seventh grade students examine southwestern art and

early modern painters. The eighth grade course continues the study of modern art and explores great art of the non-western world. Students explore a variety of media and styles while creating "period pieces" related to their area of study. Each child is encouraged to express him/herself through creating/performing not only in art, but also through problem solving, service outreach projects, exploration of the aesthetic nature of God's creations, and religious themes in art, music, and theater.

The school is looking at the assessment process and is gathering different types of evaluation tools for assessing art and music. The fine arts bring appreciation, imagination, and sensitivity to students; therefore, its evaluation process must reflect those values to the students and parents. Teachers, students, and parents are encouraged to utilize growth portfolios in conferences with parents.

Foreign Languages

Holy Spirit Episcopal School's Spanish program strives to teach students the Spanish language and to offer students an understanding and appreciation of Hispanic cultures. These aims encompass understanding and producing language in real-life, age-appropriate settings and taking part in actual cultural experiences. Spanish instruction is consistently taught in the Spanish language with minimal use of spoken English.

Oral communication skills are developed through formal and informal speaking activities that are geared to the learners' interests, developmental levels, and experiential background. Lessons are designed to appeal to a variety of learning styles and to incorporate frequent opportunities for movement and physical activity. For the young learner, the communicative contexts include social and cultural situations, games, songs, rhymes, stories, and experiences with arts and crafts. Comprehension is emphasized rather than speaking at the beginning of the program. Instruction also aims to develop useful reading strategies in Spanish and to instill the ability to complete real reading tasks. Reading and writing are used as communicative tools, as appropriate to the age and interests of the learners, even in the early stages of development. In the lower school, students progress from the ability to understand words to the ability to ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and maintain simple face-to-face conversations.

In middle school, students begin to develop the ability to participate in simple conversations of topics beyond the most immediate needs as listening and speaking proficiencies expand to social activity in the wider world. They express ideas, talk about activities and obligations using present, future, and past tenses, and practice using appropriate forms of address when speaking to different people. Reading material also diverges from the strictly personal as students learn to read simple texts from history and legend. Students continue to develop the ability to handle successfully a variety of communicative tasks and social situations.

Holy Spirit initiated a cultural exchange program with St. Michael's School,

a well-established elementary and secondary school in San Jose, Costa Rica, seven years ago. This relationship enhances the Spanish program by providing great motivation for learning the language. Students use their Spanish skills as they exchange projects and pen pal letters in grades one through eight and participate in a yearly nine-day student exchange program for fourth and fifth grade students. Holy Spirit's staff believes that the integration of children from two distinct cultures is important in order to mitigate barriers of individualism and to stimulate the processes of communication and socialization. The objectives of the cultural exchange are to provide child-appropriate experiences within a family and school setting in the host country, to introduce host families to children who are growing up in very different settings, to create respect and affection for other ways of being and living, and to increase language ability in the target language. Currently, the school is researching opportunities for a middle school exchange trip. The students have received enormous benefits from our sister school relationship. They are increasingly able to look at students and families in other parts of the world with tolerance and understanding, and they respect other cultures and values, experiencing both their differences and their similarities as human beings in positive ways. Studies show that students in elementary and middle school are open to the world in a unique way, and Holy Spirit is taking advantage of this window in time to introduce them to Costa Rican culture.

Holy Spirit's Spanish program presents Hispanic culture in age-appropriate ways in each grade level. In the lower school, students are introduced to Hispanic behaviors and gestures, and they begin to develop an idea of Costa Rica as a country by locating it on a map, identifying its flag, and responding to its artwork and artifacts. Students are introduced to other Central American countries with map work. They also identify Costa Rican money and produce artwork related to Costa Rica. Their knowledge of Central America is expanded with floor map activities and participation in an Independence Day parade on September 15. Activities dealing with Central American foods and other products add to this knowledge. They also identify many different types of people as Central Americans as they come to understand the complex character of this region. In middle school, cultural activities are expanded to include the Hispanic population and culture in the United States, Mexico, and Spain.

The review of the educational program takes place on a regular basis through monthly meetings of the division directors, assistant head, the Spanish program director, and teachers, and through additional weekly meetings to assess curriculum.

Immanuel Lutheran School

Palatine, IL

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1988 and 2001
http://www.ilcp.org

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

The focus of Immanuel's program is to help prepare children for a lifetime of Christian learning and service while pursuing a rigorous, academic program in a disciplined, nurturing environment. Immanuel's educational program stimulates spiritual, academic, social, emotional and physical growth in an atmosphere of love and respect. Immanuel's educational philosophy enables the students to be productive and responsible individuals. Christian education is integrated into all areas of the curriculum at Immanuel. Students' individual abilities, talents and interests are developed to encourage a sense of personal responsibility for their education and a lifetime of service to the Lord. The principal, teachers, church and school staff, parents, volunteers, parishioners and student body work together to instill academic and moral values in the students. Staff, students, parents and parishioners support each other in prayer, making Immanuel a caring, connected community in Christ.

Immanuel Lutheran School utilizes on-going parent satisfaction surveys, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, open Board of the Christian School meetings, Parent-Teacher League meetings and Voter's Assembly meetings to share ideas, express concerns and make decisions to ensure an academically and spiritually rich education for the children. As a result of these communications, programs are implemented to promote scholastic achievement and integrate the accomplishment of essential life skills.

Immanuel's three-year North Central Accreditation School Improvement program emphasizes respect and responsibility. Students take an active role in

setting classroom rules and participate in the Quest "Skills for Adolescence" Program. An attitude of mutual respect is further stressed in a yearly contract signed by students and parents. To ensure student achievement and continued school improvement in Immanuel's curriculum and program enhancements, teachers participate in educational workshops, seminars, professional organizations and in-service training to keep informed and current. Rich and varied educational experiences support different learning styles, and children are encouraged to use their unique gifts. A special education consultant is regularly available for the benefit of children with special needs, while Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math curricula allow students to succeed at their own levels. In the upper grades, students have the opportunity to experience field trips to Springfield, Illinois; Walcamp in Kingston, Illinois; Seacamp in Florida; and Washington, D.C. Recognizing that children's gifts are varied and extend beyond regular academics, students have the opportunity to participate in band, bell and vocal choirs, musicals, talent shows, the Fine Arts Festival, foreign language, Young Rembrandts, Student Council, the school newspaper and yearbook committees at Immanuel. Christian values, teamwork and sportsmanship are also instilled through extracurricular sports, such as cross-country, volleyball, basketball, cheerleading and track.

Fostering a caring community goes beyond the doors of Immanuel's school as classes design and lead chapel services. Classes encourage each other to donate chapel offerings for various undertakings, such as supporting orphans in Thailand and India and providing supplies for "By Kids, For Kids" Mexico program. In conjunction with the Methodist Church, students have collected backpacks with school supplies for the Hispanic community. The students have also created cards for veterans and collected socks and other comfort items for those in veterans' hospitals. Dedicated teachers and staff provide a Christian model through leading by example, and students are inspired to devote their time and talents to participating in school and community service projects. The children visit local area nursing homes each year, collect clothing, food and school supplies for those in need, and volunteer to help with Special Olympics and Little City, a home for the mentally challenged, spreading God's love and warmth through their efforts. As a result of these opportunities, students are well prepared for a lifetime of Christian learning and service when they leave Immanuel.

What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does your school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

Immanuel students have many opportunities to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults. Perhaps most important, Immanuel students and adults recognize one another as members of the same family—the family of God. These ties are strengthened by praying for one another and through participating in group devotions in an atmosphere that deepens Christian values and builds strong relational foundations. Children participate in establishing and upholding classroom rules. Should a disruption occur, teachers freely talk with children about Christian ways to handle the situation so students learn conflict resolution skills and respect for each other. For example, these lessons were effective when a seventh-grade student with emotional problems felt he was being "picked on" by another student. Three of his peers talked with the teacher to develop a strategy incorporating Christian love and respect with conflict resolution skills. The student's emotional behavior became more positive, and he was much better able to interact with his peers.

Throughout their day, students interact with many adults in addition to their teachers: coaches, pastors, the youth director, dance and field trip chaperones, and leaders for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, choir and band. Parent volunteers regularly help students in reading, computers, cooking, physical education, art awareness, the cafeteria and library. Students also build relationships with adults through Junior Achievement, mentors from the local junior college, student teachers from Concordia University, multi-day writing workshops and community service projects. An Extended School Supervision (ESS) program operated by caring adults offers an organized program of varied activities for those students needing adult companionship and supervision after school hours. Students also interview area nursing home residents to gain their perspectives.

Immanuel students support and teach one another through peer tutoring and inter-grade buddy programs. Second and seventh grades write books together, first and sixth grades collaborate on art projects, and middle school students square dance with fourth graders during physical education. Throughout the school year, fourth grade and kindergarten students pair weekly as "Reading Buddies," while sixth and first grades and seventh and second grades sit together as "Chapel Buddies." During National Lutheran Schools Week, the student body breaks into multi-grade "families" for part of the day for festive activities. The friendships formed through the inter-grade buddy programs are obvious in the hallways...and

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in years to come, as high school students visit with former buddies after Sunday worship or cheer them on in extracurricular activities.

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

How is your school organized to provide for differing student academic needs within the school's goals, priorities, and curriculum?

Immanuel Lutheran School is divided according to four departments: early childhood, kindergarten through second grade, third grade through fifth grade, and the middle school, which includes sixth grade through eighth grade. Presently, there are two classrooms for every grade except the eighth grade. The middle school is located in a wing of the new building. The early childhood department is also located in a separate wing of the building. Classes are heterogeneously grouped, except for the seventh and eighth grade math classes, to allow students optimum academic challenge and development. Seventh and eighth grade math classes are ability grouped for advanced pre-algebra and algebra classes. At the present time, 71% of last year's seventh-grade class moved into the advanced math class in eighth grade, and 63% of last year's sixth-grade class moved into the advanced math class in seventh grade. On-going math skills tests help teachers determine when a student is ready to move into a math group with a more challenging curriculum.

Students' learning levels and needs are determined through a variety of assessments and are considered in establishing placements of students. Students identified with special needs are assessed by the Lutheran Special Education Services. At the end of the year, the student's present teacher, principal and teachers in the upcoming grade meet for class placement. Social, academic and the personal needs of each student are considered before placement occurs. Classes in the same grade are balanced with regard to class size, the students' social needs and range of abilities.

Immanuel Lutheran School's expanded computer capabilities and refurbished library are designed for use by all classes throughout the school day. The newly renovated Discipleship Center provides students with a music room and band area.

To ensure an optimum learning environment in the younger grades, the first- and second-grade classrooms have two-parent volunteer teams who come to school every day to assist with small reading groups, art projects, computer lab time and various enrichment opportunities.

How do you ensure that diverse learners have the opportunity to learn challenging content and achieve at high levels?

In lieu of a separately structured gifted curriculum, individual classroom teachers and school administrators enrich students in both academic and non-academic areas. Students complete differentiated and challenging assignments, utilize technology, and work with resource teachers to grow at their own pace and reach learning goals agreed upon with the teacher. Teachers further challenge them through co-curricular activities.

Peer tutoring is utilized to benefit both the student "teacher" and the "pupil." Immanuel has an on-site special education consultant from Lutheran Special Education Services three full days each week. The consultant coordinates assessment of students referred by parents or classroom teachers. Once the needs of the student are determined, the special education consultant works with the teacher to design a strategy and activities for the student. Parents and volunteers also work closely with the teacher to tutor children and supplement skill development. Outside remediation is recommended when deemed helpful. The goal is to have these children mainstreamed by middle school.

The curriculum is adjusted according to the needs of the students. All students take standardized tests during regular test times. The needs of physically challenged students have been addressed.. Although a bilingual language program is not currently necessary at Immanuel, the school will continue to assess this area.

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Near North Montessori School

Chicago, IL

American Montessori Society
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.nnms.org

Summary

Near North Montessori School (NNMS) is located at 1434 West Division Street, Chicago, Illinois. Founded by a small group of parents in 1963, NNMS is a not-for-profit private school committed to the Montessori method of education. NNMS currently serves over 450 diverse families with children from the age of 6 months to 14 years old. Set in an urban environment that contains a parish grade school, a Hispanic and Polish primary-middle school, and a Catholic high school, as well as residential and commercial development areas, NNMS represents an exceptional educational experience in a diverse metropolitan area

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

The calm and nurturing learning environment at NNMS is a direct result of the school's organizational structure, its positive school culture, the impressive productivity of the entire school community as a working team, and the inspiring Montessori educational program. The school as a whole continually reflects upon the needs of the children and responds to them, with input from all members of the school community. Responsible decision making, mutual respect and cooperation, and the contemplative mining of talents and skills all nourish NNMS's cohesive culture. For example, the school's board of directors, with 18 elected parent volunteers and two elected staff members, along with the executive director, is responsible for policy making, budget matters, and the

financial stability of the school. Staff members are elected to serve as representatives on the board of directors and also serve on board committees. An Annual Members Meeting is held each June where parents and staff can hear the annual reports of the board committees and raise questions and issues pertaining to the school. All adult members of the school community are encouraged to attend the board of director's monthly meetings. In addition, astute hiring practices, curriculum progression with input from parents and staff, and stable financial practices contribute to the school's synergistic culture.

Parent input is critical to the vitality of the school. An extensive parent survey was conducted in 1998 to elicit opinions from families on all facets of the school's activities. This was the second parent survey taken in the last six years. The board's long-range planning committee and the curriculum committee are using survey results to fine-tune plans for the school's future. Input on the science and Spanish curriculum resulted in a curriculum committee review of these subjects for possible modification and enhancement. In the Overall Impressions section of the survey, a parent stated: " NNM does an excellent job of engendering a love of learning in children."

Good communication is another essential part of the school's culture. Weekly school updates are provided in the *This Week* publication; a Web site designed by NNMS students provides school and classroom news; and frequent mailings are sent out to parents informing them of upcoming programs and events. Communication among the staff is enhanced by class-level meetings where issues and pertinent articles on topics such as reading, gifted students, and attention deficit disorder are discussed. All staff meetings are held regularly and foster open lines of communication. Room parents and the Parent Association serve as sources of information on classroom and school-wide events throughout the year. Discussion groups for adults on books, such as *It's Not Fair, Jeremy Spencer's Parents Let Him Stay Up All Night* by Anthony E. Wolf, Ph.D, meet in the classroom in the evening as part of the school's ongoing parent education. And a mother/daughter book group has spontaneously formed in one of the 9-12 classes.

The caring community at NNMS stems from these essential components of a positive school culture, but also transcends it. Children learn respect, cooperation, and a regard for personal safety from adult role models at NNMS and from one another. They also learn kindness, compassion, and empathy. When one child is injured on the playground, two or three children kindly help the child to the office, and at least one helper offers to fetch ice packs.

What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does your school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

NNMS students have an extraordinary opportunity to build sustained and caring relationships with their teachers because of the three-year classroom term. Over a three-year period, teachers watch students grow and develop. They become keenly aware of a student's academic and social needs. Students learn to trust and engage their teachers appropriately. The week-long trips at the 6-9, 9-12, and 12-14 age levels also offer a unique opportunity for bonding between students and teachers outside the classroom. This experience results in a sustained, caring relationship that lasts even after the student moves up to another class level or graduates. There is respect and real affection between the teachers and the students at NNMS. It is nourishment for the student's spirit and a source of inspiration when it comes time for academic work. Students value this opportunity stating: " It is odd to develop a friendship with a teacher in other schools" and "You really get to know your teachers because you are with them three years in a row."

Opportunities to build relationships with other staff members and adults in the NNMS community are often realized through after-school enrichment programs, Girl and Boy Scout groups drawn from the school community, and the fact that other staff members, including the executive director, the assistant director and the business manager, often take part in the outdoor education trips taken away from school.

Programs for students who have trouble feeling as though they fit in socially are also available. Students who struggle with loss and self-acceptance as a result of a divorce in the family may attend Two Homes, where children meet twice a week to discuss common issues. Children who have difficulty with social skills may attend the Friendship Club and learn to overcome feelings of isolation. Children who suffer from non-verbal learning disabilities or low self-esteem may attend STARS, a group that addresses social therapy and recreational skills.

An example of how social challenges are met in the classroom is the practice of using place cards at lunch time on a twice weekly basis. Students have assigned seating and learn to intermingle with a variety of students. This encourages a comfort level with all classmates and makes a difference in how the students interact with one another at lunch, on the playground, and in group learning. It is a simple but effective way to maintain a healthy peer climate.

An overall healthy peer climate is achieved at NNMS through small group learning, larger group work on school projects (such as the 9-12 age level Science

Fair), class presentation night, and class performances. When disputes arise, students are encouraged to use conflict resolution techniques to resolve arguments and restore peace. Class meetings, led by students with elected officers, also contribute to a democratic process that invites participation, support and respect. Mutual regard for the feelings of one another encourages students to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves.

One example of NNMS's healthy peer climate, and the need for student input and inclusion, is demonstrated by the school's traditional approach to graduation. After a student spends nearly their entire childhood at NNMS, graduation is a revered event. All classes attend graduation; each class level sings a heartfelt farewell song; younger students bring flowers up on stage, placing them in vases made by the upper elementary students for the graduates. Up until recently, plans for the graduation ceremony were normally left in the hands of parents and the administration. However, seventh grade students voiced their opinion that they wanted to take a more active role in the organization of the event and plan special ways to honor their graduating classmates. A team of seventh grade volunteers signed up and became part of the working committee that organizes graduation, including helping with graduation programs, the greeting and seating of guests, and refreshments. There is rarely a dry eye—at any age—at graduation.

Orchard School of the Julia Dyckman Andrus Memorial

Yonkers, NY

National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1990, 1994, and 2001
http://www.andruschildren.org

Summary

The Orchard School of the Julia Dyckman Andrus Memorial is situated ten miles north of New York City on the east bank of the Hudson River. We are a small, highly specialized school, providing special education services to 148 seriously emotionally handicapped and learning disabled students, kindergarten through 9th grade, on the campus of our residential treatment center. We serve children from 30 school districts in Westchester and surrounding counties. The Memorial was founded in 1928 as a children's home by the philanthropist John E. Andrus in memory of his wife Julia, who grew up on the Dyckman family farm that is now our campus. Over the years, the Memorial has evolved into a multifaceted campus and community treatment center.

Active Teaching and Learning

In what ways do your teaching practices support student-initiated learning?

Teachers at the Orchard School have high expectations for all students. State of the art teaching practices are strengthened through agency staff development, instructional staff development, generous tuition reimbursement to encourage the pursuit of advanced degrees, attendance and presentations at local and national conferences, membership in a range of professional organizations. Colleagues share insights and methods. The result is on-going staff improvement consistent with examples of whetted and satisfied curiosity, both individual and group. Examples of project-based learning are abundant.

One project used the rain forest as a topic of research and investigation. The

upper grade classes collaborated and made use of an empty classroom. This room was transformed into a simulated rainforest atmosphere equipped with a canopy of thousands of leaves strewn across the ceiling. Trees were constructed of *papier-mache*. Tropical plants and animals added to the realistic design of this special place in this world. Different musical sources played sounds and music that added a life-like forest enchantment. The room was also filled with educational material that children could look at, read and then answer questions about. Young children from the self-contained classes were escorted and "guided" through the vines and twisty paths of rustling leaves and made to experience a "Disney like" approach to education about the rainforest. Staff, children, and administrators from the agency would comment that the effects were so real that it was the next best thing to actually being there.

Another project used a team-teaching approach to hold a Caribbean Festival day that instilled a feeling of being in the tropics. The children transformed the classroom into a vivid display of palm trees, sun, sand, with indigenous music and other colorful backdrops. Presentations by the classes highlighted the research. Caribbean food, dancing, singing, and parental involvement made this a community project. Holiday celebrations involving food and historical events are common collaborative events.

Students, with staff and parents as spectators, conducted a videotaped mock trial of the tobacco industry. Children across classes were involved as were teachers, social workers, administrators, and support services personnel acting as witnesses, experts, judge, and bailiff. Students acted as attorneys, jurors, witnesses, and spectators. The student jurors, with a teacher's assistance, rendered the verdict after due deliberation.

Students created the "F107 Savings Bank." The children were officers of the bank, assisted in making rules and policies, and acted as tellers and accountants. The children had checkbooks, donated by banks in our local areas, so that they had an actual savings account that was monitored by teacher and child. This experience opened the world of banking, making math real and practical. The students also visited banks in the local area where representatives from each department met with them to explain job descriptions and bank functions.

Social skills are an important part of the curriculum. We have added classes that teach children to examine and analyze their different responses to different situations. The children host breakfasts for different departments in the agency. In this activity the children choose a department to be honored. They then send out invitations, choose color schemes, create a menu, select entertainment, and prepare a program for the event.

In our home economics classes children learn how to sew and cook. As a final project in sewing, children make items for school fairs. They make decorative pillows, aprons, vests, pocketbooks, tree skirts, wall hangings, and a variety of other

items. The cooking class final project requires students to present a formal dinner or an outdoor barbecue. Students choose a theme and are solely responsible for the entire presentation from choosing dinnerware to creating a decorative atmosphere and presenting food in an appealing manner.

Indicators of Academic Success

How do you use assessment results to understand and improve student and school performance? How are data used to influence decision-making?

The educational data collection at the Orchard School is one piece of a larger outcome-quality improvement project at the Julia Dyckman Andrus Memorial. The initial educational data obtained on every entering student is used by the Instructional Team to design an educational program that is sensitive to the unique and complex needs of our children.

Educational data is aggregated yearly by our research group. This data is used to analyze trends in our student population and to assess response rates to different types of educational and cognitive intervention. For example, the Orchard School population has a large percentage of students (32%) with language disorders. We have found that these students are well below our other students in their academic achievement and overall cognitive functioning. We have been able to show that our speech and language intervention and language-enriched classrooms have made a significant difference in these students' educational progress. Similarly, for our students with severe reading disorders, our Orton-Gillingham based individual reading remediation has proved effective in reversing the downward educational trend.

The educational data is also used to assess overall curriculum effectiveness. We have spotted trends in our population of poor mathematics skill development. This finding led senior administrators to develop a teacher-led committee that would look at overall mathematics instruction and a plan to change aspects of the curriculum (e.g., textbooks, instructional approaches). Similarly, the educational data found that many of our younger students were having significant reading difficulties. This led to substantial changes in instructional methodology over the past two years. We have adopted a modified Orton methodology in small group format, altered educational programming by integrating reading and writing for the first 90 minutes of each school day with students grouped by reading level, and provided more agency-sponsored teacher training in reading intervention.

Previously Recognized Schools

Have you had any interactions with other schools to share some of your successful strategies and practices? Has your staff been involved in leadership or training programs beyond your school to disseminate practices and programs? If so, please elaborate.

The Orchard School has been committed to the collaboration with other agencies and organizations in the dissemination of expertise and best practice. Interactions have been local, statewide, national, and international in scope.

Locally, The Orchard School is a charter member of NY SPEED, (New York State Principals Organization for Education of Emotionally Disturbed Children). This organization, co-founded by the Orchard School principal in 1989, has grown in status and scope to currently include a membership of over thirty special education schools. During the last two years, 1999 and 2000, The Orchard School has sponsored, in collaboration with NY SPEED, an invitational conference for the practitioners who work with children with emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. Over fifty agencies, both public and private, have attended each conference. Dr. Janet Lerner and Dr. Allen Mendler were our first two keynote speakers. Over a dozen workshops are presented by teachers, administrators, and clinicians from member organizations and from the New York State Department of Education (SED). In addition to hosting the NY SPEED conference, The Orchard School has opened its doors to countless local special education and mainstream programs, including Green Chimneys, New York Institute of Special Education, The Cottage School, Graham School, N.Y.C. public schools, BOCES programs, and the Harborside Connecticut Middle School.

On a state level, The Orchard School has presented workshops at SED promoting excellence and self-assessment strategies related to the Blue Ribbon Schools process (1995-96). Staff and administrators have presented workshops for ANYSEED (Association of New York State Education of the Emotionally Disturbed) regarding curricula adjustments for summer programming (1996, 1997). In 1998, instructional leaders from The Orchard School presented at the SEALTA – Chapter 853 Coalition conference in Albany, NY.

On a national level, The Orchard School and the Andrus community have worked with NAPSEC (National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children). The President and CEO of our agency, Gary Carman, was instrumental

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in providing leadership in the adaptation of ESCERS (a self-evaluation instrument) for use by NAPSEC member schools. ECSERS was developed at The Orchard School in collaboration with the Educational Administration Department at Syracuse University in 1988 and has been used nationally by schools at residential treatment centers as a self-evaluation instrument. The Orchard School principal, Jack Breen, a major contributor to the development of the original instrument, has provided a site evaluation for NAPSEC. Additionally, Mr. Breen sits on the Governmental Affairs Committee and the Outcome Committee at NAPSEC. In 2000, Mr. Breen served as a site visitor for the Blue Ribbon Schools program, reporting on middle schools in Connecticut and Illinois.

In the spring of 1994, two senior teachers, Kim Armand and Helene Matterazzo, visited Brussels for training in the assessment and re-education of children with Central Information Processing Disorders (CIPD). This began an ongoing journey of exploration into the causes and treatment of learning disabilities as manifest in our population of emotionally disturbed, behavior disordered children. From 1994 through 1997, The Orchard School worked and trained with staff form Easton Children's Home in Easton, Pennsylvania, and Holy Family Institute in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Training was provided in both the United States and France by Dr. David Feldman, Isabel Feldman-Ainouz, and Wally van Grunsuen, architects and instructors of the program at the Bellefonds Institute in Cenon, France. By 1997, we were increasingly dissatisfied with the process and outcome of this approach and our relation with Bellefonds discontinued. In 1998, we began an agency-wide initiative to capitalize on advanced brain research and to implement a research project which we call our Neurodevelopmental Classroom Project. Results from this project, as with our other projects, will be reviewed and shared with our colleagues.

Our Lady of Grace

Edina, MN

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.olgschool.net

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

What is the process for continuous curriculum renewal at your school? What questions about curriculum is your school currently addressing?

Our multifaceted curriculum review is an intentional and serious endeavor. It provides us with a promise for future educational success while capturing the learning moments of today. The review process includes annual review of learner outcomes, curriculum mapping, review of test data and teaching practices, and development of a long-range curriculum review plan.

An important renewal process is the annual revision of learner outcomes. In 1993 our staff and administration initiated a comprehensive revision of our curriculum. The staff articulated the individual outcomes that each student was to achieve for each subject area at each grade level based upon a learner outcome model developed by John Wessels. The Archdiocese then adopted their own model, the HALOS program (Holistic Archdiocesan Learner Outcomes) which was integrated into the OLG curriculum. Outcomes define what we expect our students to learn and are at the center of all activities, assignments, and assessments. Revisions are made based on student performance and teacher observations within the classroom and across grade levels. This broad-based approach ensures that the learning needs of the students are met as they move from grade to grade.

Curriculum mapping was incorporated in 1999 as another way to review our curriculum. Mapping provides the opportunity to view the subject matter vertically through the grade level and horizontally throughout all grades. This panoramic view allows for more coherent and complementary learning between

and within grade levels. Beginning with the language arts curriculum, each language arts teacher provided a curriculum map identifying the content, skills, assessment, and resources taught within his/her class. Faculty and administration critically examined these maps and recommended curriculum changes based upon recognized gaps, repetitions, and needed modifications. The language arts curriculum can be enhanced by other disciplines, including art, physical education, music, and Spanish.

Our formal testing and assessment program is a valuable diagnostic and evaluative tool. For example, the second grade test results on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Seventh Edition (MAT7) prompted a change in the first grade curriculum. Students' performance indicated a need for more emphasis on sentence structure and grammar while in first grade. The eighth grade test results from the Minnesota Basic Standards Test prompted a changed in the math and language arts curriculum. In grades 3-8 a stronger nonfiction component was added to the reading program and a basic skills component was added to the eighth grade algebra program.

Practices and procedures are reviewed to determine how they support the curriculum and impact the learner. During the 1998/1999 school year, it was determined that we needed to do more to understand the types of learners within our school. We analyzed our students and determined they fall into categories that can be described as gifted, distracted, auditory or visual, experiential, engaged, disengaged, and challenged. We reviewed various school practices and procedures in relation to how they supported each type of learner. Based upon this review, changes were made in addressing assignments, grading, assessing daily work, and defining the impact of individual versus group work.

OLG plans for future curriculum renewal include yearly mapping of a curriculum area and implementation of our long-range curriculum review plan. During the 1999/2000 school year, faculty and administration formulated a five-year plan to review designated subject areas on a yearly basis. The review examines current research and best practices in education and makes recommendations for change. During the 2000/2001 school year, the Language Arts curriculum review will be completed and the mapping process will begin for math. Parents are apprised of these processes at the annual Partners In Education nights.

Active Teaching and Learning

How are the teaching practices and learning experiences in your school consistent with the current knowledge about successful teaching and learning?

Based upon national curriculum report recommendations, students need active, inquiry-based classroom experiences for optimal learning. To address these recommendations, OLG has implemented Dimensions of Learning (Marzano), a framework that utilizes current educational research and best practices. The following five components of Dimensions of Learning are incorporated throughout the curriculum: Positive Attitudes and Perceptions about Learning; Acquiring and Integrating Knowledge; Extending and Refining Knowledge; Using Knowledge Meaningfully; and Productive Habits of Mind. The current knowledge on Multiple Intelligences, brain-based research, higher order thinking skills, and cooperative learning are incorporated within this framework.

The first dimension, Positive Attitudes and Perceptions about Learning, helps students develop the understanding that attitudes and perceptions influence their learning. For example, third grade students are welcomed to their classroom as part of the "Team". Each student is involved in designing a pennant that lists characteristics that will make their "Team" great, such as being a good listener and being respectful to others. All students then read it together and each one signs the pennant. The pennant is displayed in a prominent place in the classroom for the school year.

The second dimension, Acquire and Integrate Knowledge, addresses declarative and procedural knowledge and teaching the learner various strategies to store and organize new information. In music class students pair up and develop mnemonics to remember the lines and spaces of the music staff. The pairs then teach the mnemonics to other students in the class. Graphic organizers, such as webs and flow charts, provide a strategy for students to organize and enhance their learning and retain information.

The third dimension, Extending and Refining Knowledge, provides specific teaching strategies designed to actively involve the learner in complex reasoning. In language arts, students are asked to analyze the perspectives of the main characters of a novel. In doing so, students not only show that they understand the character but they learn to appreciate different perspectives. Students use a decision-making matrix to help them decide what choices a literature character could make. Students abstract a main theme from the novel, then are asked to

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apply that same theme to something in their lives.

The fourth dimension, Using Knowledge Meaningfully, requires students to engage in reasoning processes in long-term projects or tasks that demonstrate a deeper level of meaning beyond a simple recall of information. In the Middle School, students participate in an annual science fair. Using complex reasoning processes such as problem solving, investigation, invention, and decision making, the students investigate a specific issue or problem that has meaning to them. As a culmination of their work, students present their project at the science fair for groups of parents, teachers and other students in the school.

The fifth dimension, Habits of Mind, helps develop productive mental behaviors. The behaviors of critical thinking, creative thinking, and self-regulated thinking enhance students' learning of content knowledge. The students are taught skills such as perseverance, pushing the limits of one's own knowledge and ability, and thinking "outside the box." For example, in fifth grade, students are challenged to be critical thinkers as they examine the presidential candidates and the election issue. Students are asked how they would solve national issues facing the candidates in the areas of social security, education, and defense.

Professional Community

What opportunities do teachers and other staff have to build professional community that enhance their collective capacity to work together to support student learning?

Our professional community views teaching as a vocation and our calling is to strive to ensure the success of all learners. Our autonomous site-based management enhances our ability to develop and participate in professional development programs that support our curriculum and meet the specific needs of our students.

One of our strongest assets is that professional in-service training is done as an entire staff. The staff begins each school year with 5-8 days of in-service. Our long-range education plan, current educational research and best practices determine the focus of the in-service. The staff has been intensely involved in Dimensions of Learning (DOL) and each staff member has participated in 40-50 hours of training in the past two years. Following the training, the teachers worked together during the following year creating classroom environments that were positive and welcoming; designing assessments, rubrics, and checklists to authenticate student learning; and developing clear objectives and packages utilizing current curriculum and incorporating the components of the DOL program. DOL provided an

opportunity for teachers to work in an atmosphere of collegial support where they were able to implement new teaching strategies and share results with other teachers. Curriculum mapping has encouraged interaction and conversation among teachers of different disciplines and grade levels. Group technology training has included 120 hours per staff member over a five-year period. This collective experience of training has resulted in a cohesive faculty that works as a team and enjoys an atmosphere of collegial support.

Our staff members participate in weekly meetings on an all-school faculty, division level, and/or grade level basis. These meetings enable our staff to collectively address issues that affect the learning community and provide an opportunity to share resources and classroom management techniques, discuss scheduling issues and staff support, and share success stories and student issues. The staff meetings also provide input and direction for our ongoing educational plan. This weekly interaction fosters collective responsibility and ownership of the decisions made within the school community.

Additional activities support a community atmosphere among the faculty. On Fridays our teachers come together for prayer lead by a staff member. A Sunshine Club, comprised of teachers, recognizes special events happening in the lives of the staff such as birthdays and weddings. Teachers have formed a Book of the Month Club open to all staff. The PSO provides three luncheons a year for the faculty and church staff as an opportunity for the faculty and staff to come together and celebrate. Classroom parents take turns providing a weekly lunch or snack where faculty may interact on their break time.

What opportunities do teachers and other staff have to build professional community that enhance their collective capacity to work together to support student learning?

Professional development is a hallmark of OLG and essential to the growth of our teachers and the success of our students. The administration provides direction toward common goals and facilitates professional development opportunities to achieve those goals. For example, after mapping the language arts curriculum, it was determined that it was necessary to create a scope and sequence for writing, addressing grammar, spelling and mechanics. As a result, outside trainers in-serviced the teachers in the University of Kansas writing project during the in-service for the 2000/2001 school year. This training will assist the teachers in developing a scope and sequence for writing across the curriculum and address the long-range curriculum plan. Additional topics for in-services have included Brain-Based Research, Technology, Adapting

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Classroom Requirements for Students with Learning Issues, Scripture Study – The Covenant, Profiles of Learning, and Minnesota State Guidelines.

As a community of life-long learners we continually seek opportunities for professional development. We participate in outside educational offerings sponsored by our Archdiocese and local public school district. Our entire staff attended the National Catholic Education Association annual conference in 1997. Teachers who have received advanced training in a particular area often lead staff in-services. For example, two of our teachers received intensive training in Dimensions of Learning and then conducted the in-services for the entire staff. The school and the Archdiocese provided the teachers with the financial support and the time needed to attend the training. These two staff members then led the training for the Archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The professional development of these two teachers not only helped improve our own curriculum, but also benefited other schools by helping them implement the program.

Our teachers attend professional development worksh[illegible] throughout the year based upon their areas of interest or expertise. Teachers a[illegible] provided release time and financial support for professional days in which to attend professional or personal development workshops. Topics have included Chicago Math, Catholic Teachings of Social Justice, Orton Gillingham Reading, PowerPoint Presentations, Strategy-Based Instruction for Foreign Language, and Technology in Music. Time is allotted during staff and grade-level meetings for teachers to share their learning with their colleagues. Teachers are also provided a stipend for post-graduate work. Our salary structure provides an incentive and compensation for teacher[illegible] who achieve advanced degrees. Five of our staff members have obtained higher degrees. Currently seven more of our teachers are pursuing post-graduate degrees and will provide additional expertise and support to the staff in the areas of special education and curriculum development. Of these seven teachers, three were awarded full scholarships to St. Thomas University and two of the teachers were offered partial scholarships from St. Mary's University. The administration is sensitive to the release-time and schedule changes necessary to fulfill these commitments and work with faculty to accommodate them.

The Pegasus School

Huntington Beach, CA

National Association of Independent Schools
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.pegasus-school.net/

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

The Pegasus School is first and foremost a learning community dedicated to the life of the mind. It is our belief that true learning can only occur in an environment where individuals respect each other and where there is a high degree of tolerance for individual differences within a framework of shared values.

Collective inquiry and reflection are an integral part of the Pegasus curriculum. Beginning in first grade an emphasis is placed on responsible student decision making, as parents are encouraged to allow students independent responsibility for their work. Teachers are consistently reinforcing this point in conferences, presentations, and special workshops.

Faculty, parents, and trustees engage in collective inquiry and reflection in a number of different ways. The Board of Trustees and its committees meet regularly with the school administration in order to gather information, set general policy, and ensure the financial well being of the institution. Once a year the Board holds a retreat which provides a time for reflection, discussion, and consensus on particular issues or on strategic planning.

The Parent Teacher Organization is an integral part of the school culture. Parent partnership in the life of the school is one of the founding tenets of the Pegasus philosophy. The PTO works closely with the faculty and individual members spend many long hours supporting common goals and helping in the classroom.

The Founder/Director and the Middle School Director hold a series of monthly coffees designed to educate parents about a wide variety of educational

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and developmental issues, as well as to engage in dialogue about school policies and activities.

Faculty are members of ad hoc committees focused on specific issues, standing curriculum committees and Faculty Council, which meets regularly with the administration. The Assistant Director meets regularly with grade-level teams in the Lower School to discuss individual students, curriculum, and programs. The Middle School Director meets biweekly with the Middle School faculty team for the same reason. A faculty retreat is held annually with a focus on learning about a single topic. In the recent past we have focused on gifted children and learning styles, for example. This year we all read Parker J. Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* and devoted our retreat to what the book might tell us about ourselves as individual teachers and about what characteristics are necessary to build a strong community. The faculty also sponsor a hospitality committee that responds to individual teachers in need of help or solace during times of trouble as well as celebrating birthdays, weddings, the birth or adoption of children, etc.

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

How does your curriculum serve the broad goals for student learning and development that the public generally expects education to achieve: personal and intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for work and higher education? What relative emphasis do you place on these goals in your curriculum?

The core of our school's curriculum is a focus on skills in reading/language arts, mathematics, and social studies. These subjects are taught in kindergarten through fifth grade (Lower School) on a daily basis. This curriculum is taught at a challenging level appropriate for bright and gifted students, although from first through third grade students are grouped for math and reading. By fourth grade it is felt that our students have received sufficient basic reading skills so in the last two years of Lower School (fourth and fifth grade) students are heterogeneously grouped in that subject. Although we continue to group students for math instruction in fourth and fifth grade and provide a variety of learning activities designed to support students' individual and interactive needs.

The resource program, which consists of science, physical education, music, art, Spanish and technology, provides opportunities for students to work with specially trained teachers who encourage skill development in those areas.

Wherever possible, or as appropriate, these classes are integrated with the core curriculum. For example, in third grade the social studies unit on the rain forest and environmental issues is aligned with a science unit related to that topic. Projects and experiments are coordinated between the science teacher and classroom teachers to ensure that students see how environmental issues affect them and the world around them.

Throughout the school and throughout all subjects an emphasis is placed at all levels on appropriate behavior, consideration of others, and developing the student's sense of responsibility for his/her own behavior. Our school's Behavioral Expectations are posted in each classroom, and each year teachers spend time discussing those behaviors and how the students can carry them out in that particular classroom that year. The Teacher Assistants reinforce those expectations on the playground at lunch and at recess times.

Our Spanish program, in particular, which has been taught from kindergarten through eighth grade, helps students to develop respect for the Latino/Hispanic culture, as well as provide them with language training. By the time they graduate, our students are well prepared for Spanish II classes in high school. In the upper grades the students are matched with a pen pal from a school in Madrid, Spain. This correspondence is continued through eighth grade so that students have an opportunity to get to know a great deal about the Spanish culture, customs, and idiom. The correspondence involves an exchange of letters as well as videotapes. In seventh and eighth grade, students are given the option of traveling to Spain with the Spanish teacher and parent chaperones. They tour major cities in Spain and spend the final three days of the trip with their pen pals at the school in Madrid and at the pen pal's home. This has been a remarkable experience that has opened our students' eyes in a very personal way to Spanish culture and history.

Throughout all grade levels in our Social Studies curriculum our students study and learn to appreciate the diverse world around them. Starting in kindergarten with a study of themselves and their families, and ending with a two-year study of World History in seventh and eighth grade, an emphasis is placed on building students' critical thinking skills, as well as respect for themselves and others. They study the many ways in which people are the same, as well as ways in which they are different culturally, ethnically, and in their beliefs and values. In several grade levels students do in-depth studies of Native Americans, helping them to appreciate not only the historical facts, but their place in American culture today. In fifth grade, students complete a States' Fair project in which each student is responsible for researching a particular state and a famous person from that state who made a significant contribution to our country and/or the world. They prepare both a written and oral report on the person's contributions, presenting that report to their parents and classmates dressed as the character. In addition, they prepare a three-dimensional presentation advertising the wonders of their state plus samples

of food that result in a multi-cultural food festival as part of the States' Fair.

All of these activities involve study, technology, and writing skills, as well as training in oral presentation skills. Students work on projects individually as well as in small groups so that they get the benefit of challenging their own abilities and honing their skills in working with others.

Students also gain leadership experience in working with others through Student Council, which involves second through eighth grade students, and other committees such as our Technology Committee and the Middle School Advisory Council.

Throughout the curriculum, students are encouraged to go beyond what is required to challenge and hone their abilities and delve deeply into the subject matter. While students are typically working above grade level in the core curriculum, those students with advanced abilities are encouraged to explore subjects in more depth.

Sacred Heart Model School

Louisville, KY

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 2001
http://www.ucschools.com/shms

School Organization and Culture

How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

The school community of SHMS is built upon the four Ursuline core values of reverence, service, leadership, and community. We recognize that to teach reverence we must as a faculty act reverently in every interaction with a student or a parent, and with each other, as well. We believe that an important goal of our educational program is to help students recognize and develop the gifts and talents that they have been given to use in service to God, each other, the community, and our natural environment. We believe that service should be a daily way of life and that special opportunities for service projects help to develop the habits and a mindset that will make this practice lifelong. Examples of projects that students organize are the annual Appalachian Toy Drive, the adoption of families during the Christmas season, and the selection of two charities to benefit from all funds collected by the Student Council.

To develop leadership qualities, all students are encouraged to speak at Student Council assemblies as representatives of their classes. Level 8 students have a speakers class in which parents, alums, and community figures who exemplify one or more of the Ursuline values come as role models to talk with the students. The development of community occurs on many levels. One period a week is called Community Period. Twice each day the entire school tunes into our closed-circuit network for community prayers and announcements. Children with birthdays, new brother or sister announcements, or special accomplishments are celebrated with guest appearances. Community is developed through special family events throughout the year, including a Back to School Mass and Picnic, a

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Spaghetti Dinner, Adult Social evenings, Grandparents Day, and a Lenten prayer group for parents. Formation of the faculty into a community is facilitated through an annual retreat, a Book/Discussion Club focused on educational issues, and birthday celebrations.

The community of SHMS is a dynamic organism built upon a strong foundation of Ursuline core values and a commitment to academic excellence. The educational experience is constantly changing and developing through the input of students, parents, and teachers. Small groups of Level 8 students meet with the administrators to have lunch and brainstorm ideas related to improvement of the SHMS program. Students are frequently consulted about the pacing of class and assessments, the design and choice of projects, and areas of particular curricular interest. Students have also helped to choose different novels to be read in Language Arts class. Parent feedback gathered through surveys and interviews occurs at regular intervals and has resulted in a strengthening of the Fine Arts program and the adoption of a full-day kindergarten. The reflective teaching style of our faculty helps us to continually grow. Each academic department has been involved in discussions to redefine the curricular scope and sequence, and a faculty study group collectively engaging in reflection on teaching practices has been meeting for the past five months.

What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does your school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

Before a student ever sets foot in SHMS as a new student, he/she receives a personal note of welcome from the principal. Every year students receive a welcome letter from their homeroom teachers. The principal, assistant principal, or a teacher opens their car doors at the beginning and end of each day during carpool. This permits personal conversation with students at the beginning of every day and daily connection with their parents. The size of our student body and the growth of our school have been intentionally limited to permit teachers to know all of the students. Teachers interact informally with the students during lunch and EPE times and at community events. Students who are involved in extracurricular activities develop strong relationships with and receive special encouragement from the teachers who coordinate these activities Teachers attend sporting events, Quick Recall matches, and other competitions to show their support.

Besides teachers, our students are blessed with the presence of many other

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caring adults. Parents are often in our building helping with various projects and interacting with the children. Two retired Ursuline Sisters collect lunch money every day, and another works with the children in Levels K-2. Our Level 1 students adopt Sister Grandmothers who reside at neighboring Marian Home and write to them and visit periodically. Children see many of the other Sisters on campus when we invite them to join us for special events.

Every year the principal meets with all students within the first days of school. She discusses expectations of the students including the ways they are to interact with and treat each other. Throughout the school year, kindness and respect for peers are promoted by encouraging the children to pray for petitions submitted by their classmates, by constantly discussing expectations of consideration before an event or project, by recognizing and celebrating individuality, and by regularly complimenting students who noticeably demonstrate respect for others. Each year, during Catholic Schools Week, students from every level are recognized for their particular commitment to the Ursuline values, especially reverence of their classmates.

Should an occasion arise in which respect is not being extended to a classmate, the issue is addressed immediately by the teachers or by the administration in either an individual session or a class meeting. Such an incident occurred with the girls in Level 7 last year. A particular group became intent on excluding others and engaged in harassment via the Internet. Though much of the behavior took place outside school, the impact of their collective actions was seriously affecting the environment at school. The principal successively talked with each member of the group individually and with her parents, and with the entire group. The seriousness of the harassment was clearly discussed, and expectations for change of behavior were firmly laid out. Dining room seating was regulated for a period of time. The principal continued to meet with the girls periodically to discuss the changes that were occurring. The situation deescalated, and social interactions among these students became much more respectful.

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

How does your curriculum serve the broad goals for student learning and development that the public generally expects education to achieve: personal and intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for work and higher education? What relative emphasis do you place on these goals in your curriculum?

The Sacred Heart Model School faculty believes that the education it provides to students in grades K-8 is both the foundation and formation for the adults they will become. To that end, a strong emphasis on basic skills marks the curriculum. So that teachers can best guide students in the development of basic skills, classes in language arts and mathematics are our smallest classes, with the average being 14-15 students. In language arts there is emphasis on the communication skills of reading, writing, and speaking, while in mathematics, skills of computation and application are targeted. Science labs enable students to develop basic skills of observation, analysis, and reporting. Because basic skill development for the student of the 21st century must necessarily involve technological skills, technology is interwoven throughout the curriculum to provide students with opportunities to practically apply the skills they are developing. In all content areas of the curriculum, teachers place greatest emphasis on understanding of content. Their goal is to shape students to have the self-discipline to be responsible for their own learning and to know how and where to find information and answers. Teaching practices encourage students to work together in the exploration of topics and resolution of problems.

In keeping with our school mission, great emphasis is put on the development of character and ethical judgment. In age appropriate ways all students are taught the Ursuline values of reverence, service, community, and leadership. Discussions about literature, world issues, other cultures, and scientific developments are all teachable moments for transferring these abstract concepts into reality. Respect and consideration for classmates and adults, as well as good manners, are taught and expected of all students. Teachers are encouraged to discuss issues of character development in conference situations, and student awards are given at midyear and at the end of the year to students who model our core values in particularly exemplary ways.

Preparing students for a world that is both complex and diverse is a

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challenging task. All students are encouraged to take risks in the classroom and in extracurricular activities and to recognize mistakes as part of learning so that they will be able to adapt and flourish in a milieu of rapid change. Every opportunity is taken to mine the treasure of the ethnic diversity that exists within our school community. Parents are invited to speak, to share special holidays or customs, and to make cultural studies come alive. However, to reflect the extent of diversity in our larger community, we try to extend the students' experience through speakers and other programs. Our relationship with the Catholic Charities Refugee Office has provided wonderful opportunities for education as well as service. Every year over fifty of our older students participate in the Kentucky United Nations Assembly (KUNA) and represent Third World nations. This experience of taking on the culture and problems of a nation so different than our own is undoubtedly one of the most significant learning experiences in which our students engage. In addition, an intensive study of the Kentucky General Assembly during its biennial meeting, mock Presidential elections and debates, research papers connected with Presidential elections, and an active Student Council help the students to grow in the appreciation of democratic values.

It is our goal that service should become a way of life for our students. Each year the Student Council chooses charities to be the beneficiaries of monthly Student Council collections and the annual Penny War. Other school-wide service projects include a toy drive for the children of an Appalachian community, sponsorship of families in need at Christmas time, and a Thanksgiving food drive. In addition, individual classes take on projects such as making favors for the Red Cross, visiting the retired religious sisters who live on campus, providing personal care items for a homeless shelter, collecting hats for children on cancer wards, and holding parties for disadvantaged pre-school children. Organizing and being responsible for such projects provides our students with valuable experience in leadership.

In all academic areas, teachers expect students to show respect for those with different learning styles or opinions and to develop excellent listening skills. They work to instill in students personal pride in the quality, appearance, and timeliness of their work. They try to help students recognize their individual talents and potential, their obligation to share them with others and the fact that they truly can make a difference by doing so. It is our hope that every class at SHMS is both directed at the whole child and a life lesson.

St. Agatha Catholic School

Columbus, Ohio

National Catholic Educational Association
Blue Ribbon Schools Winner 1986 and 2001
http://www.ucschools.com/shms

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

How does your curriculum serve the broad goals for student learning and development that the public generally expects education to achieve?

Our emphasis on Catholic values throughout our curriculum is the foundation of our development of intellectual capacity, moral judgment and behavior, and community citizenship.

Basic Skills. Our primary grades (K-3) have as their primary academic goal the acquisition of basic skills, such as reading, writing, spelling and math computation, within the academic disciplines of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, religion and the arts. At this stage the students are learning to read, but by the intermediate grades (4-5) and middle grades (6-8), the students are reading to learn and are expected to have mastered basic skills. The students in the upper grades use these basic skills to explore the academic disciplines in more depth.

Learning in the Academic Disciplines. By the intermediate grades (4-5) and middle school (6-8), students delve into the academic disciplines. The school's curriculum varies depending on grade, but each grade includes as discrete courses language arts, mathematics, science and health, social studies, religion, foreign language, art, music, computer education and physical education. Students in the intermediate grades and middle school change classes and have several teachers, each of whom is a specialist in the academic discipline he or she teaches. At the same time, teachers cooperate with each other in integrating the academic disciplines to address a subject area.

Character Development and Ethical Judgment. Although all students have classes dedicated to religious education, that education does not stop when the religion book is closed and the math book is opened. Instead, students are challenged to think and debate about ethical conflicts in literature, history, social

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studies and science. Through the Second Step Program (K-8), children learn empathy, impulse control, anger management and conflict resolution. Teachers and staff receive in-service education on the Second Step Program so that it is implemented consistently. Parents have the opportunity to learn and participate in the Second Step Program. All students who participate in a sports program and their parents must read, sign and abide by a sportsmanship code, which prohibits derogatory comments directed toward any player, coach, official or parent before, during or after any game or practice. St. Agatha periodically implements informal programs to promote positive interaction and inclusion among the students. For example, in the CARE Program, children and teachers wore buttons to remind them to show courtesy and respect for everyone. This year the administration established a "Kindness Campaign" during which children were invited to "tattle" on classmates who performed acts of kindness for, or service to, a fellow classmate. Students who performed kind acts were rewarded with a small treat.

The development of character and moral judgment also depend upon a knowledge of, and an appreciation for, the consequences of poor choices. Students are required, beginning in third grade, to use student planners to track homework assignments and special events. All students are held responsible for completing in-class and at-home assignments. Students are encouraged to succeed by receiving aid in the planning and research phases of a long-term project or research assignment. For example, the teacher may send home a timeline of steps to be accomplished by specified dates, and may personally review with the student his progress toward the completion of the assignment. Such in-depth assignments begin as early as second grade and progress in complexity through Science Fair in the seventh grade and History Fair in the eighth grade. Field trips are sometimes used to reinforce this message. Eighth-graders recently toured all areas of the county jail, including the solitary lockup. They were able to see first hand the consequences of bad behavior, not just in terms of the incarceration of the inmates, but also in terms of the effect on the inmate's family and the cost to the community in jail expenses and wasted human resources.

Preparation for Life in a Complex and Diverse Society. St. Agatha recognizes that the demographics of its student population and immediate neighborhood do not mirror the country as a whole. There is, therefore, a greater burden on the school to prepare students to take their part in the global community, in terms of cultural tolerance and appreciation, as well as civic responsibility. St. Agatha partners with St. Stephens Community House, a racially and socio-economically diverse community center, on literacy initiatives for the St. Stephens community. Students listen to a first-hand account of the Holocaust from a survivor. The Spanish language and Hispanic culture are introduced in kindergarten in songs, prayers, common words and an introduction to holidays and customs. By the eighth grade, students attend two to three Spanish classes each

week. Third grade includes a unit on Japan. As part of that unit, the children read Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes and Meiko and the Fifth Treasure by Eleanor Coerr. They read, study and write haiku; attend a presentation by a Japanese national of traditional kimonos, geta and obi; learn origami; create a Japanese doll; calculate on an abacus; learn about food and common customs of contemporary Japan; and try their hand at Japanese calligraphy, as they write a story with Japanese pictures and words. In recognition that "service should follow scholarship," the students have learned about Kenya through their support for a school outside Nairobi. Over the past three years, students have collected "Coins for Kenya" to purchase school supplies and to provide funds for structural improvement of its facility. One of our students visited the Kenyan school and upon his return made presentations to individual classes about the differences between our cultures and educational opportunities. St. Agatha also sponsored visits to the school by the Zivili Dancers, a troupe that is famous for its inspired performances of ethnic dances and music from the Balkan region. Zivili members lectured the students on the customs and history of the region, and delivered mail from the students of St. Agatha to students in Bosnia. Through Samaritan's Purse, students prepared and sent shoeboxes at Christmas filled with toys, candy and personal care items to children in other countries, including Bosnia.

Appreciation for Democratic Values / Participation in the Practices of Democracy and Community Service. St. Agatha believes that appreciation for democratic values comes through a study of democracy in our country, through a study of countries that do not possess our freedoms and through participation in the democratic process. A student council, to which representatives of the middle school classes are elected, leads the students in community service projects, such as the canned food drive and lunch services at a local homeless shelter, and provides input to the school administration on various school questions. The school is a designated voting site for the citizens of Franklin County. Students participate in a mock vote during presidential elections. Elections also provide an opportunity for our students to consider campaign issues, which are a springboard for classroom discussion. Seventh and eighth-grade students are given the opportunity to debate in which they watch election debates, write reaction papers on the issues, and conduct their own debate. Freedom and democracy, once won, must be constantly re-examined if they are to be maintained. Therefore, students study the women's suffrage and the civil rights movements, as well as the military conflicts which produced, protected and tested our democracy.

Development of Interpersonal, Technological, and Other Skills Valued in the Workplace. St. Agatha stresses the development of basic skills within the academic disciplines. General communication skills, problem-solving skills and conflict resolution (such as the Second Step Program) are also important to any workplace. The ability to communicate clearly, logically, persuasively and

dispassionately is essential to conflict resolution, group problem-solving and building a consensus within a community. St. Agatha teaches its students to recognize that communication involves listening to, reading about, and critically evaluating the thoughts and ideas of others, as well as conveying one's own thoughts in written and oral form. Journal writing is pursued in most grades, starting in 1st grade. Letter writing is pursued in all grades through pen-pal projects, literature-based reading logs and journal responses, and letters of complaint or praise to businesses or public officials. Research and persuasive writing and oral and computer-assisted presentations are pursued in all grades. Mathematics is not taught simply by rote, but as a tool within a problem-solving context. Last year's Middle School Moments, where professionals came to school to discuss their careers, and this year's Career Exploratory gave students a chance to begin to develop an individual career plan.

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